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TOM GALLON

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1. Fiction, English.

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TINMAN

By

TOM GALLON

Author of "Jarwick the Prodigal,' 'Tatterly," etc., etc.

BOSTON
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PART I

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CHAPTER I

WHAT I FOUND IN THE WOOD

IN all that I shall set down here, in telling the strange story of my poor life, I shall write nothing but the truth. It has been written in many odd times and in many odd places: in a prison cell, on paper stamped with the prison mark; on odd scraps of paper in a lonely garret under the stars, with a candle-end for light—and I, poor and old and shivering—scrawling hastily because the time was so short. I have been at once the meanest and the greatest of all men; the meanest—because all men shuddered at the mere mention of my name, and at the thought of what I had done; the greatest—because one woman loved me, and taught me that beyond that nothing else mattered. I have lived in God's sunlight, and in the sunlight of her eyes; I have gone down into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and have not been afraid; I have been caged like a wild beast, until I forgot the world, just as the world forgot me. In a mere matter of the counting of years I am but little past forty years of age; yet I am an old man, and I have lived two lives—just as, when my time comes, I shall have died two deaths. I have touched the warm lips of Love; I have clasped the gaunt hands of Misery. I have warmed both hands at the fire of Life; but now the fire has gone out, and only the cold grey ashes remain. But of all that you may read,

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just as I have written it, and as the memory of it has come back to me. Roll up the curtain—and see me as I was—and judge me lightly.

* * * * *

It is not necessary that you should hear what manner of boy I was, nor how I impressed those with whom I came in contact. I have no recollection of my parents; they died, perhaps mercifully for them, when I was quite young. I went to school in the ordinary way; I would not have you think that I was anything but an ordinary boy. A little dreamy, perhaps, and introspective; with those hopes and high ideals that come to youth generally a little stronger in my case than in that of most boys. I had a very decent fortune, left in the hands of a highly respectable guardian; for the rest, apart from the mere matter of education, I discovered pretty early that I was to be left to my own devices, it being considered sufficient that I should grow up as a gentleman, and should please myself. I think now that if I had had some guiding will stronger than my own, I might never have done what I did, and I might now be a highly respectable citizen, respected by those who knew me, and with a life of easy contentment spreading itself fairly about my feet. Instead of which——

I had made up my mind to be an artist; to that direction all my thoughts and dreams and ideas tended. I would paint great pictures; I would wander through the cities of the world, and see the pictures other men had painted; I would live a life that had in it nothing of commercialism, and nothing of the sordid. I did not know then how circumstances mould a life and change it; how rough-fingered Fate can step in, and tear asunder in a moment the fair threads we have woven, and twist and tangle them, and ruin the fabric.

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Like many another poor fool before me, I told myself that I could do what I liked with my life, and shape it in what fashion I would.

Up to this time—that is, the time when I began to think for myself, and to take my life into my own hands—I had not met my guardian. I had had one or two curt and business-like notes from him during my schooldays; and when I went to London I found that he had taken a lodging for me, and had made various arrangements for my future. He was a little contemptuous as to the profession I had adopted; but shrugged his shoulders, and suggested that it was no real concern of his. I met him first, on my coming to London, at his office in the City—an office in a narrow dingy court, where he was in a position of some authority as manager to a big firm. I know nothing of business, and knew nothing then; I only know that he received me in a private room, and that I had a dim understanding that in another room still more private was one greater than himself, to whom he looked for instructions, just as all those below him looked to him. Jervis Fanshawe, with half a dozen little white stops let into the edge of the big desk at which he sat, to enable him to communicate with his subordinates, was evidently a power to be reckoned with.

I think, in that moment when I first saw the man, that I knew instinctively I did not like him. He was leaning forward across the great desk, with his arms stretched out upon it, and with a paper-knife balanced between his hands lengthwise; he seemed to be summing me up, and making up his mind about me. He was a man of about thirty-five, inclined to baldness, and with a long clean-shaven face; he gave one the impression that if he had allowed his beard to grow, it would have been singularly black. His nose was long and thin, with rather wide nostrils;

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and there was a deep cut in the very centre of his chin. Altogether it was a strong face, and a sinister.

I was beginning to feel uncomfortable when at last he dropped the paper-knife, and stood up to shake hands with me. "So you are Charles Avaline?" he said. "I'm glad to see you. How old are you? I forget times and dates."

"I shall be twenty in a month," I replied, "but I feel much older."

"Most people do at your age," he retorted. "Well —there are certain arrangements to be made about your future—your income, and so on"—he was looking down at the desk, and shifting some papers about uneasily there—"and perhaps it would be better if you came round to my rooms to-night to see me. I've got an old-fashioned place in Bloomsbury; perhaps you'll dine with me there. I'll write the address down for you; seven sharp, please."

I felt myself dismissed, and went away, to make acquaintance with that London that I felt was to be my home for some considerable time to come Boy that I was, I wandered its streets happily enough for the greater part of the day, feeling that this was my kingdom, and that I had come into full possession of it already. Here I was to work, and live, and dream, and be happy. I have thought since of that day—dreamed those dreams again—and laughed to think that it was really to be the one day in all my life that I was to see London with those eyes at all.

It was a fine night, and I walked to Bloomsbury; having some difficulty in finding it, because my pride forbade that I should appear a country bumpkin, unacquainted with London, and under the necessity of asking my way. Coming to the house hurriedly and a little late, I saw a man who had been going along before me mounting the steps of the house, and tug-

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ging at the bell. Having rung, he turned about, with his hands on his hips, and with a cane in one hand resting against his hip, and surveyed me, as I waited a couple of steps below him, awkwardly enough, for the door to open. He had the advantage of being bigger and older than I was, to say nothing of the two steps upon which he was mounted.

He was a big young man, some ten years older than myself; very well dressed, and with a swaggering air upon him that made me even then feel my blood tingle a little. He stared down at me, and pulled at a little dark moustache he wore; and then looked over my head. I was glad when the door was at last opened, and when he faced about, and marched in.

There was another uncomfortable pause, in a room that was apparently my guardian's sitting-room, until my guardian put in an appearance; a pause during which the big young man and myself wandered about uncomfortably, and looked at the few pictures, or stared out of the window. Then Jervis Fanshawe came in, and introduced us.

"This is a—a friend of mine—Mr. Gavin Hockley," he said, glancing at the other man a little resentfully, as I thought. "My ward—Mr. Avaline." The young man glanced at me for a moment, and nodded, and turned away. "We can go in to dinner; we're a small party—but none the worse for that, I hope."

It was not a cheerful dinner, by any means. We sat round a circular table, and were waited upon by a silent, elderly woman, who was evidently very much afraid of Mr. Fanshawe. The dinner was plain and substantial, and I was young and hungry; the wines, I believe, were good, although I was no judge of that particular department. I only know that the man Hockley drank a great deal, and told some stories I did not understand, and some that I understood only

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too well. He absolutely ignored me, even when I made a remark (which was but seldom), and he talked to my guardian with an easy insolent familiarity that I did not then understand. Strangely, too, my guardian seemed to defer to him in all matters, and to be afraid of contradicting even the most outrageous statement.

"I'm thinking," said Hockley, towards the close of the dinner, and pausing for a moment, with his glass held near to his lips—"I'm thinking of going down to Hammerstone Market again."

I saw that Jervis Fanshawe looked up at him quickly; when he replied, he spoke more sharply than he had yet done. "What for?" he asked.

"I'm thinking of going down—for the fishing," replied Hockley; and as I looked at him I saw that his face was creased in a grin, and that he was watching Fanshawe. "That is, of course," he added, with a guffaw, "my sort of fishing."

"You won't be welcome," said my guardian sourly; and the other man responded with an oath that he could find his welcome anywhere.

After we had left the table, I saw Jervis Fanshawe take the other man aside, and begin talking to him in a low voice, as though impressing something upon him. But Hockley shook him off, and answered whatever had been said aloud.

"I tell you I'm going—and the best thing you can do is to go with me. If it comes to that, you know what I am when I get a bit excited; I might need your restraining hand. You'd better make up your mind when you'll go, and I'll make my arrangements accordingly."

My guardian said nothing, and the other man threw himself into a large armchair, and began to smoke. It was quite late, and I had already begun to think about going, when he got up, and went off without so much

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as a word of farewell to either of us. Only at the door, with his hat on the back of his head, he came back to demand an answer to the question he had put at least an hour before.

"What date will suit you—next week?" he asked.

Jervis Fanshawe did not look at him; he was nervously twisting his hands together behind his back. "I shall go down on Tuesday to Hammerstone Market," he said, "and I shall stay at the house."

"Good. I shall stay at the *George*." Hockley lurched out of the doorway, and we heard him slam the outer door of the house as he went away.

And instantly there came a remarkable change over my guardian. In all my life I never remember to have seen a man so suddenly become a wild beast in a moment as Jervis Fanshawe did then. He ran to the door, and pulled it open, and spluttered out blasphemies into the darkness of the staircase; slammed the door, and came back into the room again, and raged up and down there, saying horrible things about Hockley until my blood seemed to run cold. And all the time taking not the faintest notice of me at all.

Presently he sat down at the table, pulling at his lips with his long fingers, and still muttering and breathing hard; it was like the gradual dying away of a storm. After a time I ventured to speak to him, and to wish him good-night; I believe I muttered some thanks for my entertainment. As he took no notice of me, I went to the door, and found my way to the place where my hat was; I was going out, when I heard his voice calling to me sharply. I went back, and found him waiting there, with a face that was comparatively calm.

"I don't know much about you artist fellows," he said, without looking at me—"but I believe you sketch—paint out of doors—don't you?" As I mur-

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mured that we did sometimes do that kind of thing, he went on hurriedly: "I know a place where you would probably find some good bits to sketch; you'd better go down with me. It's the place that fellow spoke of just now—Hammerstone Market. I've got to go down there—on business; old Patton lives there."

"Patton?" I asked vaguely; for I seemed to have seen the name somewhere.

"Yes, yes," he replied impatiently. "Patton & Co.: the people for whom I am manager. You were in their place to-day. He has a country house—down there—and I go down when I like. We'll go on Tuesday; pack your things; I want you to make a bit of a splash down there—play the gentleman. Do you understand?"

"Not quite," I said.

"I want to take the wind out of this fellow's sails—this beast Hockley," he said. "I'd grind him to powder, if I had the chance—crush him to nothing. You and I will play our own game, Charlie"—(it was the first time he had called me by that name, and I was a little surprised)—"and make him put his tail between his legs. There—we won't talk any more about it; good-night!"

I walked home to the rooms Mr. Jervis Fanshawe had taken for me with my head in a whirl. I know that I fell asleep that night, with a vague idea that in some extraordinary fashion my guardian was in the power of Gavin Hockley, and was obliged, in a sense, to do what that young man suggested. Perhaps the mere act of thinking about that drove me into the dream I presently had; for I remember that I thought presently I was standing in a room, and that Hockley was before me, with that grin upon his face; in that dream I felt that some one put a weapon into my hand.

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Dreams are but intangible things, and this was a confused one, with only the face of Hockley grinning at me from out of it, and the knowledge in my own mind that I held a weapon of some sort gripped in my right hand. And then the face was gone, and I seemed to wake up, to see him at my feet, with blood upon him. I woke, trembling and shuddering, and glad to see the calm moon staring in at me from the little street outside. It took me a little time to shake off the horror of the thing. But I was young, and youth needs sleep; so that I presently slept until morning.

Strangely enough, that dream haunted me—sprang up before me even in the sunlight of the streets, and would not be shaken off. Seeing that I had no earthly concern with Hockley, it was at least curious that I should so persistently think of him; now as I had seen him swaggering on the steps of the house, and staring insolently over my head; now as I remembered him lounging at the table, and apparently overawing my guardian; and now again, as in my dream, with his grinning face watching me—and then lying at my feet, with blood upon him. I was too young for such horrors, and yet I could not clear my brain of them.

That Tuesday arrived on which I was to travel down to Hammerstone Market with Mr. Jervis Fanshawe. I had had a note from him the night before, appointing the time of the train, and requesting me to meet him at the railway station; and I was eager enough for the expedition. Although I did not like Fanshawe, and felt that I never could, there was yet in my heart a natural feeling of regard for him, as being the one person intimately connected with me, and, above all, the man who had looked after my interests during the years that I had been growing up. I set it down deliberately here that I wanted to please him, and that,

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above all things, I was anxious to win his approval. In a sense I was glad to think that he wanted my company, although I wondered a little what was going to happen at this place to which we were going.

In the train he set the matter fairly and clearly before me. "I am going to this place, Charlie, on a matter of business," he said in a low tone, and without looking at me. "Old Patton, as we call him in the business, likes to make a friend of me as much as possible; I have been down here frequently. It gives me a certain position with him—smooths business generally. I can't say exactly how long I shall stop at his house; he does not come up to the office as frequently as he used to do, and there are certain matters he wants to discuss with me."

"It is very kind of you to take me with you," I said; but with a grim smile he broke in on my enthusiasm.

"Oh, I'm not taking you to the house," he said, "I shall have to leave you at the *George*. I intend, if possible, to get an invitation for you to dinner one night—or perhaps to a luncheon; but at the moment I merely want Patton to know that you are there, and who you are. He will probably like to know that I am your guardian, and "—he hesitated for a moment as though casting about in his mind for the right word—"and responsible for you."

I have since come to think that whatever scheme was in the mind of the man then, and whatever he meant to do, his real object in taking me there, to begin with, was no deeper than that. I think he felt that it would look well that he should have the responsibility of me upon his shoulders—that it would give him an air of stability, and would cause people to think well of him—much as though he held before himself the record of a good deed as a species of shield,

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and cried—"This have I done—and that; judge me in the light of it."

So it came about that I was left at the *George* in the little town of Hammerstone Market, while Jervis Fanshawe went on to the house of Mr. Patton, which lay a little outside the town. The country round about seemed to be very pretty, and I was free to do as I liked until such time as my guardian should call upon me to go back to London, or to visit him at the house of his patron. I liked the look of the little old-fashioned hotel, and I liked the prospect of this new freedom, as I unpacked my bag that first night, in my room that overlooked the sleepy little High Street of the town.

Yet that prospect was blurred and made hideous in the morning by the sudden incursion into it all of that heavy young man named Gavin Hockley. I had had my breakfast (and a hearty one at that) in the old low-roofed coffee-room, and was just making up my mind to sally forth and do a long day's work, when the door was thrust open lumberingly and brutally, and Hockley strode in. Whether or not he knew from my guardian that I was there it is impossible to say; he looked over me, or through me, as on the occasion of our first meeting, and lumbered out again, slamming the door behind him. Remembering all that I had thought about him, and remembering my dream, I was too much upset by his sudden entry into the room even to be able to speak to him; he was gone before I had made up my mind what to do.

When I came out into the little hall of the place, I saw him lounging with one elbow on the low counter at one side, talking to the girl who stood among the bottles and glasses behind it; and one heavy hand was on his hip, and in that hand was his stick, just as it had been when he stood on the steps and looked

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down at me. The little place seemed full of him—poisoned by him; I was glad to get out into the sweet air of the little town, and further than that into the woods and the fields.

I like to think of that morning now: I have seen myself, in imagination, going so often down a long, dusty road, with my easel and colour box slung across my shoulders; I believe I sang softly to myself as I went. For the spring was in my heart and in my blood, and life was very, very beautiful. I see myself leaving the road behind me, and turning into a little wood near at hand, and sitting down to sketch the glories that stretched before me. But I was like a butterfly that morning, in that all was so beautiful that nothing wholly pleased me; I went deeper on into the wood, and started again to paint. And lost myself in my work and in a waking dream, until I was aroused by the sound of a young girl singing.

(I lay down my pen here for a moment or two, because my eyes are dim, and I cannot go on. The sunlight and the trees and all the mystery and the beauty of the woods are with me again, and the dear voice of the woman I was to love through all my life floats to me again, and stirs something within my sad heart that was stirred that morning, never to be still again. I close my eyes for a moment, and cover them with my hands; and I am back there once more, looking at her wonderingly as she comes towards me through the trees.)

I will not try to describe her; I only know that she was very, very fair, and that she seemed almost a spirit of beauty, coming out of the wood towards me. She was Nature—and Love—and Life—and Laughter—all embodied; I could only sit and watch her; it did not occur to me even to ask myself who she was.

She did not see me until she was quite close, and

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then she stopped, and looked at me, quite unafraid. She was quite young—only eighteen, as I knew afterwards—and she looked little more than a child. As I stumbled to my feet, she looked shyly at me, and smiled; and it seemed then as though I knew her, and as though she knew me. Afterwards, when we came at another time to talk about it, she told me that it had seemed as though she had come there to meet me out of some other life that was left behind with that moment; and indeed, I cannot better express my own feelings than in that way. Perhaps Youth called to Youth; or perhaps all that was to be was written down in some grim Book of Fate, of which we did not hold the key.

She shyly looked at my work, and asked questions about it; begged that I would go on with it—and perhaps wondered why I could not, with her distracting draperies fluttering against me almost, as she stood. Like a child, and with a child's confidence in me, she offered to show me a spot in the woods more beautiful than that I had chosen; I left my easel, and we walked side by side among the trees, talking. I do not know now of what we talked, but we seemed to speak of everything vital and important in heaven and earth. And then, surprisingly, she told me her name.

"I am Barbara Patton. I ought to have told you."

"Patton?" I said, remembering my guardian's mention of that name, and of the house at which he was living.

"Yes; Mr. Patton, up at the house there, is my father. And you?"

I gave her my name, and we laughed a little consciously at the thought that now we should know each other perfectly, and that all was fair and straight between us. I have never met any one like her—never

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any one so wonderful; I have known but few women, but I am sure there never was any one like her in the world. She woke in me then, apart from the love I knew had come into my heart at the mere sight of her, a desire to protect her; and to be chivalrous and manly and strong, for her sake, to every creature in the world.

I told her about my guardian; and when I spoke of him I thought I saw the girlish face change a little, and a look of anxiety come into the sunny eyes. A little reserve came over her, too, so that she spoke less freely of herself; I wondered if she disliked him as much as I did. Strangely enough, she voiced that feeling in a moment, when she faced round upon me and asked the question—

"Do you like him?"

"I—I don't know," I faltered. "I've only known him a matter of hours." Then, daringly willing to meet her mood in the matter, I added quickly: "Of course, if you don't like him——"

"I'm afraid of him," she said, looking quickly about her among the trees. Then, speaking more naturally, she said: "I hope I shall see something of you, Mr Avaline, before you go back to London. I'm sure that my father would be glad."

She held out her hand to me, as though in farewell, and as though desiring that some distance should be set between us after our easy familiarity. I took her hand, and held it for a moment, and looked into her eyes; and in that second of time something seemed to pass from the one to the other of us, and back again, that needed no words. It was as though each expressed dumbly to the other mute confidence in the other, and in what was in the other's heart.

I stumbled over the words I said to her. "I'm so glad—glad I've met you, Miss Patton," I said; and

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my heart sang "Barbara!" over and over again as I said it.

"I'm very glad to have met you, Mr. Avaline," she replied. And then, after shyly leaving her hand in mind for a moment, she withdrew it, and laughed, and turned away.

I watched her as she moved away through the trees, until at last she turned, and glanced back at me; and then we both turned away abruptly, and hurried out of sight. I went so fast that I stumbled, within a matter of yards, over a man lying flat on his back, smoking, and staring up at the tree-tops; I had kicked against him before I saw that it was Hockley.

"Why the devil don't you look where you're going!" he growled, in response to my apology.

I thought nothing of it then, although I have remembered it bitterly enough since. I thought only of her I had left—wondered why the world was changed in a moment for me, so that no loutish young men who sprawled in the sunlight could poison the woods for me, or spoil the prospect. And yet it seemed that that wood was haunted that day; for, as I hurried off to find my easel, I saw another man standing at the edge of a little pool, staring down into the water over his folded arms. He was so intent upon the water, or seemed to be, that he did not notice me; it was my guardian, Jervis Fanshawe.

I did not speak to him; I hurried on to where I had left my easel. Coming to it, I saw that the canvas had been overturned, and that a muddy heel had been ground into the painting, leaving it broken and ruined. I seemed to know instinctively who had done that; I hurried back through the wood in search of Hockley. But though I looked in all directions, and even called his name sternly, I saw nothing of him; and in the

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end I did not trouble further about it, but went home, hugging my new happiness in my heart.

There I found a note from my guardian, curtly bidding me come up to the house that night, to dine with Mr. Patton.

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CHAPTER II

AND WHAT I LOST

I LUNCHED alone that day, and spent the afternoon in the woods—perhaps with a vague hope that I might again see Barbara Patton, as I had seen her that morning. But I saw no one; even Hockley kept out of my way, perhaps for obvious reasons. I comforted myself with the reflection that I was to see her that night; I began to count the hours that must pass before I should meet her.

I got back to the inn, and began to dress, long before it was necessary that I should do so at all; I was like a girl in my desire to look well that night, and to create a good impression. Not that I had any definite feeling as to what was to happen in the future; it had not gone far enough for that. I was in love, and that was all I thought about; and I was going to meet her again, and to touch her hand and look into her eyes. I lived in an impossible world, and dreamed impossible dreams.

While I dressed in a perfunctory fashion, I happened to glance out of the window, and saw Jervis Fanshawe coming straight along the road towards the inn. I was a little surprised, and for one moment a horrible fear assailed me that he had come to tell me that the dinner had been postponed; the next, I stopped in what I was doing, to watch him as he walked, and to wonder at his hurry. For he was

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coming along at a sort of half trot, with his eyes bent on the ground, and his hands clasped before him; I could see the white fingers working together convulsively as he came.

He came into my room, and stood for a moment or two looking at me, as though scarcely knowing what to say, or how to account for his presence. I expressed my surprise at seeing him, and asked if anything was the matter.

"No—nothing is the matter," he replied, in a low tone. "You're early with your dressing," he added.

I muttered some excuse, and went on fastening my collar. He seated himself on the bed, so that he was directly behind me, and I could not see him. An obstinate stud happening to fall, I stooped to pick it up, and in so doing moved a little to one side; as I straightened myself again, I caught sight of his face in the looking-glass. In that momentary glimpse I had of it, I saw, to my astonishment, that it was convulsed with rage—livid with a hatred so deadly that instinctively I swung round to look at the man. But by that time the face was calm and composed, and he was speaking in an ordinary voice. The change had been so sudden and so complete that I had a dazed feeling that I must have been mistaken, and had never seen that look at all.

"I wanted to see you, Charlie, before you went to the house to-night," he began, pressing his palms closely together, and sawing his hands backwards and forwards with a regular movement between his knees as he sat. "You're going to a strange house to-night, and it's just as well, perhaps, that you should know something about the people you will meet. You're young yet, and have not had much experience."

I laughed to myself to think how little he knew that I had seen the most important person in that

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house that very day; mine was the wisdom of youth, and I was sorry for this man, so much older than myself, who did not understand these matters.

"Old Patton has every confidence in me—trusts me completely. In fact, I may say that he has a liking for me that he has for very few men."

I wondered a little what manner of man old Patton could be that he should like my guardian, but I said nothing.

"Mr. Patton has a daughter—a very presentable sort of girl, and, of course, a lady," went on Fanshawe; and for some unaccountable reason I found my fingers fumbling and trembling over the tying of my white tie. "Save for him, she is alone in the world, and must, of course, be provided for. Do you follow me?"

I followed him so well that the tie I was fumbling at had become a mere piece of crumpled rag; I tore it from my neck, and took another.

"So that I have decided to marry the girl, and in that way consolidate my position—and hers. It is, of course, not public in any way yet, and I do not wish you to say anything about it." He paused, and in the silence of the room I could hear his hands rubbing together over each other. "Well—why don't you speak?" he demanded at last.

I could not trust myself to look round; I spoke with my back to him. "And what about the young lady?" I managed to ask. "What does she say?"

"I don't understand," he responded blankly. "She hasn't said anything yet; she hasn't been asked. It isn't exactly a question for her."

I threw up my head, and I laughed loud and long. The thing was so absurd, from my point of view, and I was so sure of her, that I almost seemed to see Jervis Fanshawe standing before her, and asking his question; seemed to hear her laugh with me at the absurd-

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ity of it. What did this man know of love or a girlish heart?

He got up abruptly, and came and stood beside me; as I still laughed, he rapped sharply with his knuckles on the dressing-table, as though to call me to order. In that moment reserve was thrown aside, and the man blurted out what was in his mind.

"What were you doing in the wood to-day with her?" he asked, with his face so close to mine that I could feel his hot breath on my cheek. I faced round at him squarely.

"Why were you spying on me?" I demanded hotly; and at the look in his eyes I shrank back from him, a little afraid. For I had never seen on any face such a look of mingled fear and hopelessness, and longing and misery, as I saw in his face then.

"Why was I spying on you? Why do I spy on every one? Why do I feel, when I am near that child, like a weak and impotent child myself? I could crush the life out of her with that hand"—he shook it fiercely in the air before me as he spoke—"and yet she could make me do murder, with a word or a look. I want her—and I mean to have her; there's a passion in me that a boy such as you can't understand. Besides," he went on more calmly, "there are other reasons—reasons you know nothing about. I've gone too far to draw back—and yet I'm afraid to go on. Charlie"—he laid his hand on my arm, and I felt it shake—"you've got to help me somehow; we've got to get through this thing together. Unless I marry this girl—(and God knows I'd treat her well)—it means red ruin for me—and perhaps worse."

"She doesn't love you," I said coldly, urging the only argument I knew.

"I don't ask for that," he retorted bluntly, "because I don't understand it. I'm going to marry her.

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I think my influence is strong enough with her father for that; I am necessary to him."

"You don't know what you're talking about," I told him. "Do you think she'd turn to you, or have a word to say to you, if you tried to draw her with any other power save that of love? Women don't marry in that way," I added, with the deep wisdom that had come to me that day.

"I suppose you think she's in love with you?" he sneered.

I felt myself burning red all over the face I turned from him, yet I answered steadily. "I should like to think so," I replied; and in spite of his jeers I refused to say any more then.

He paced about the room for a time, stepping carefully over the pattern in the carpet, as though deep in thought. Presently he stopped almost behind me, and spoke in a tone that was half pleading and half threatening. "You mustn't be a fool over this matter, Charlie," he said. "Yours is calf love; you're not old enough to know anything about that sort of thing yet. Besides, old Patton would laugh at you."

"I'm not going to marry old Patton," I reminded him. "In any case, I don't want to discuss the matter, because there's nothing to discuss. Only for your own sake I would advise you to think twice before you suggest marrying Barbara Patton."

"How did you come to know her name?" he asked quickly.

"From her own lips," I replied, turning away from him, and beginning to finish my dressing.

I remember that before he hurried away he strove to patch up some sort of peace with me; held out his hand, with seeming frankness, and declared that I was a fine fellow, and that he meant to stand by me. What he meant by that I did not exactly know; I

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only understood that he was nervous and anxious, and although I chafed at the thought of his daring to raise eyes to my Barbara, I yet felt a sort of sneaking pity for him, as some one lower than myself, who did not understand this business of love, and had no real chance in the game.

Nevertheless I was troubled. I did not like the thought that this girl, who had suddenly become, in a matter of hours, so much to me, should be the centre of plots and intrigues; above all, I did not like to think that there might be a possibility that my guardian would be able to use a powerful lever to gain her father on his own side. I thought of her always among the trees in the sunlight—and alone with me; I could not bear to think of her then in any other way. Even while I longed for the moment to arrive when I should see her, I yet felt that insane jealousy of youth which resented the thought that others would be about her, and would claim her attention.

I walked in the gathering dusk to the house, being nearly run down in consequence by a dogcart, in which was seated a man whom I felt instinctively must be Gavin Hockley. I do not know why I thought so, except for his brutal method of driving, and for the fact that he shouted at me for daring to be on the same road with him. I wondered a little where he was going; I understood better when, on reaching the house, I saw him lounging with his hands in his pockets in the doorway of the drawing-room. I thought of my ruined painting, and of my escape from an accident but a few minutes before; but I said nothing. I could not quarrel with the fellow there, but I made up my mind that I would have something to say to him before we parted for the night.

The house was an old and roomy one—just the sort of country house that one would expect a substantial

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man of business to have. There were several guests besides myself: one elderly lady, whom I understood to be a sister to old Patton; a doctor from the neighbourhood and his wife; and a tall pleasant-faced young man, not very intelligent-looking, but with good-humour writ large all over him. For some reason our host was not there when we arrived, but he came in almost immediately afterwards, with Barbara on his arm, and closely followed by Jervis Fanshawe.

I cannot account for it even now, save by the suggestion that I was myself fully on the alert that night, and expectant of anything and everything that might happen; but the very air was stormy. The mere mutterings of that storm came, as it were, into the room with old Patton and his daughter; the menace of it was in the white watchful face of my guardian behind them. And yet there was nothing in the least stormy in the appearance of old Patton himself; indeed, he was quite a benevolent-looking gentleman, rather too old, I thought, to be the father of Barbara, for his hair was white, and he stooped a little as he walked. But he had a kindly face, with yet a certain strong note of determination in it.

Barbara raised her eyes to mine once, and once only; and in that flash I strove to read her thoughts and her heart. In the look I thought I detected that she mutely asked me something, or pleaded with me; so much I seemed to understand, but no more. She gave no sign of knowing me, and only bowed slightly when I was introduced; old Patton, on the other hand, greeted me warmly, and had a cordial word or two to say about my guardian. He shook hands, too, with Hockley, and seemed to know him; I gathered that Hockley had been there before.

I had had a wild dream that I might take Barbara

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in to dinner; but that was reserved for the young man of the good-humoured face. Somehow I felt I did not like him quite so well as I had at first, but, remembering our meeting in the wood, I felt that Barbara probably shared my feelings on the matter, and suffered as much as I did. I went in at the tail end of the little procession, and was consoled to find that Barbara was seated opposite me, and that I could watch her easily during the progress of the meal. Other eyes were watching her, too, with a curious intentness; my guardian's, with his nostrils distended, and his hands nervously gripping each other; Hockley's, with the brutal dull look that belonged to him. For her own part, she kept her eyes on her plate, and only now and then seemed to answer a remark addressed to her by the young man of the good-humoured face, whose name I heard was Lucas Savell.

I do not remember the dinner; it seemed all Barbara. I know I replied to words addressed to me, and I suppose I replied fairly intelligently; but all the time I seemed to see that face before me, and to see it, strangely enough, as the centre of that storm-cloud that was gathering. From that face I would glance for a moment to the face of Jervis Fanshawe, that never seemed to change, and that was like a white mask; and from that again to the face of old Patton, at the head of the table, watching the bent head of his daughter; or again to Hockley, lounging clumsily in his chair, with his shoulder turned towards the doctor's wife, the while he carelessly flung a remark or two over it at that lady. And so back to Barbara again.

I awoke to the consciousness that the doctor was telling a story, and telling it, as it seemed, rather well, to judge by the interested faces about him; even Barbara had raised her head a little, and seemed to be listening.

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"It came to this, therefore," the doctor was saying, "that this man had a reason for getting rid of two people, and, so far as I can make out (for, of course, you will understand that I cannot give names or dates or places), set about deliberately to compass the death of both. The one man he determined should, if possible, be induced to kill the other, and in so doing should, of necessity, kill himself, in suffering the just penalty of his crime."

"And did the plan succeed?" It was old Patton who asked the question, and it was obvious that he asked it more to keep the conversation alive than for any real interest he felt in such a subject.

"Yes, the plan succeeded," said the doctor, softly crumbling a morsel of bread, and looking down at it, before raising his bright eyes for a moment to his host. "He brought the two men together, as if in the most innocent way; saw to it that they were thrown much into each other's company; arranged that they should become on such intimate terms that they should know each other's secret lives, and so should play into each other's hands, and into his. And in that way he almost overshot the mark; for they became so friendly that there seemed for a time but little prospect that the one should ever quarrel with the other sufficiently to seek his life. Therefore our friend determined to introduce another element—a mere pawn in the game. He chose a woman."

A little sigh went up from the company, and there was some small nodding of heads, as though this was quite what might have been expected. Glancing round the table, I caught sight of only one face, and that a horrible one; the face of Jervis Fanshawe, thrust forward, with eager eyes fixed on those of the doctor. It fascinated me, and I watched it.

"He saw to it that the woman was young, and

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attractive, and virtuous; he rightly calculated that, if carefully managed, it might happen that the younger man would fall in love with her. And sure enough that was exactly what did happen; the younger man, although quite hopelessly, worshipped her in a romantic and very ideal sort of way."

"I begin to understand," said Lucas Savell, nodding his head. "The other man fell in love with her, too."

"Nothing so commonplace," replied the doctor. "Our friend who had the scheme in mind went to that other man, and whispered lies about the woman—dropping a sure poison where he knew it would take root and spread. And presently it happened that the elder of the two men who were destined to die breathed a word against the woman the other loved, and another word, and yet another; the breach grew and grew, and the man who had repeated the lie strove hard to justify what he had said. Then came the final business of all, when the younger man, in a fit of rage, struck down his friend, and in due course paid the penalty with his life."

Another little sigh, almost of relief, as the story finished; then, after a pause, conversation broke out more generally. Looking up, I caught the eye of my guardian, and saw that he was watching me; he smiled, as a man does who catches the eye of a friend, and then looked away. And then in a moment, as it seemed, that storm that had hovered over us burst suddenly and relentlessly.

Old Patton made a sign to a servant, and whispered something to the man, who bent his head to listen; then the man and another hurried round, and began to fill the champagne glasses. I saw that Barbara was watching her father; I saw her lips parted, as though she would have spoken, but dared not. And still I did not understand; still it never occurred to

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me to look at the young man of the good-humoured face, who sat beside her, and who had, I imagine, begun to colour a little consciously.

"And now for something a little more pleasant," said old Patton, with the somewhat dictatorial air of the host. "Your glasses are charged, friends, and I have a toast to propose——"

"Not now, father," I heard Barbara's distressed voice say.

"A toast you will all be glad, I am sure, to drink heartily. I give you——"

"Father!—not now!"

"My dear child, better now than at any time," he retorted, nodding at her with a kindly frown. "My friends," he went on, looking round at us—"I have an announcement to make to you—an announcement of a very pleasing character." He cleared his throat, and jerked his chin up a little, with an air of importance. "I have to announce the engagement of my daughter Barbara to her cousin—Lucas Savell—and I ask you to drink their healths."

I know that my heart seemed to stand still; in the momentary silence I could only stare straight across at the girl. She had raised her eyes, and was looking straight at me; and again in those eyes I read pleading and entreaty, and perhaps a prayer that I would understand. Our eyes held each other's then, just as they had held by their glances in the wood.

"I am getting on in years, and it is more than possible that there is not much more time left to me," went on old Patton. "I shall be glad to feel that my child's future is safe in the hands of a good man. It has been the wish of my life that these two young people should marry, and after a little hesitation—coyness, I suppose—the thing has been settled. My friends"—he raised

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his glass, and smiled round upon us all—"the health of my daughter and of her future husband!"

We all stood up, raising our glasses, and murmuring the toast. Some little surprise and confusion was caused by the fact that the thin stem of my glass snapped in my fingers, so that the glass fell, spilling the wine over the cloth. It did not seem to matter then; nothing seemed to matter at all; the world was dead for me. I was glad when presently the ladies rose to go; I saw Savell whisper something to Barbara, and saw that she replied, without looking at him. Nor did she look at me again; she passed out of the room with bent head.

I heard a whisper at my ear. "Well, what's your opinion of women now?" I turned, and saw the leering face of Gavin Hockley, with the corners of his mouth drawn down in a sneer. I did not reply to him; I lit a cigarette that was offered me, and wondered how long I must wait before I could get away. I meant to walk the night away, and get rid of my sorrow.

We went soon into the drawing-room, for Barbara was singing, and her father wished us to hear it. Looking back on that night now, I have wondered often and often what I must have seemed like to the other guests—have wondered whether by chance any one guessed my secret, or knew the bitter ache in my heart. It was one evening in my life that was full of acutest misery; yet I was to be compensated, strangely enough, and hopelessly enough.

She had been singing, while her lover stood beside her at the piano. The room seemed suffocating, and I got up, and stood by an open French window, looking out over the dark garden; I felt somehow as though my heart, beating up madly into my throat, must burst. The music behind me ceased, and there

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was a movement in the room; I did not turn my head.

I heard rather than saw the movement of her dress near to me; caught the quick whisper that was as a mere breath of sound, as she stepped over the sill of the French window, and went past me into the darkness—

"I must speak to you."

I was stepping out straight after her, when I was thrust aside in a fashion that drove me hard against the window-frame, and Hockley strode out after her. I had recovered myself, and was beside him in a moment; but not before he had caught her hand, and drawn it under his arm roughly.

"Your future husband will have enough of you in the future, my dear," he said, a little thickly. "Come out into the garden."

Behind me in the room I could hear the soft well-bred laughter; before me in the darkness that little tragedy was going on. For the girl was pulling helplessly at his arm to get away; I heard her pleading with him in a whisper. The sight maddened me; I was not responsible for what I did. I spoke to him sharply; and as he swung round, and she strove again to free herself, I struck him with all my might—flinging all the rage and despair that was in my heart into the blow—fair on the temple. He threw up his arm, and went down backwards over some steps that led from the terrace. I felt certain that I had killed him.

The noise he made, and a shout he gave as he went down, had alarmed the people in the room; they came crowding out to see what was wrong. Their excited faces were behind us; up from the darkness rose the surprised face of Gavin Hockley; I saw him furtively brushing the dust from his clothes, as he rose first to his knees, and then to his feet.

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"Nothing to make a fuss about," he growled. "I —I slipped. Infernally dark out here."

I caught a look on the face of my guardian that puzzled me; it was that eager look again, but intensified a thousandfold; and he was smiling straight at me as though—ridiculous thought!—I had done some worthy thing in his eyes. That look surprised me, and in a vague way terrified me.

As the confusion subsided, and the people went back into the room, I found that the girl was clinging to my arm; and it seemed natural that she should do so. Hockley had slouched away, muttering that he would put himself straight; once again it happened that Barbara and I were alone together. We passed out of sight of the windows; and then in a moment, at the end of the terrace, we stood in perfect understanding, as it seemed, with hands clasping hands, and my boyish eyes looking into her girlish ones. And it was writ in the skies above us, and whispered by the trees forlornly enough, that we loved each other, and that it was all hopeless.

"I promised a year ago—before I understood," she whispered, as though taking up a tale that had been told between us. "My father likes him; he will be good to me, I know. I—I did not understand."

I seemed to live twenty lives in that moment when I stood and held her hands, and listened to her words. There was a savage pride in my heart, greater than my misery, that I should so have won her without a word; I knew that I was greater in her sight than the man whose name she was to take. Boy though I was, I know that I dedicated myself and my life to her then; the world has never seemed to me so pure and holy since as it did then. I was not ashamed of the tears I shed, as I bent my head, and put my lips to her hands; I felt that I could not shame her with

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any pleadings or protestations. When presently we were calmer, I walked slowly back into the world with her, and gave her to the man to whom she belonged, and who had come in search of her.

I did not see her again that night; she pleaded fatigue, and went to her room. The little party broke up, and I presently found myself on the high road under the stars, walking beside Jervis Fanshawe. And the thing that surprised me most was the extraordinary mood the man was in. He gave vent to little soft chuckles from time to time, and snapped his long fingers, and muttered to himself; while every now and then he dropped a hand on my shoulder, and gave it an approving squeeze, as though in pure friendliness. It was only when he spoke to me that my mind went back to my encounter with Hockley that night.

"You struck well, my boy; I'd like to have seen the whole thing, but I was a bit too late. Muscle is a magnificent possession; and you must be very strong." He slipped his hand down my arm as he spoke, and chuckled again. "Always strike hard, Charlie; stand no insolence from a creature like that. He's a leper—a bullying beast—a robber!" Strong though I was, he absolutely hurt me with the grip he gave my arm.

"He's walking along just in front of us," I said a moment later, as we saw a figure slouching along ahead.

Hockley turned as we got near to him, and waited for us. I braced myself for a possible encounter; I think in that moment I rather longed for it. But the man contented himself with coming towards us, with his hands thrust in his pockets; and so stopping in the road in the darkness to look me over.

"I make it a rule to let a man have blow for blow," he said, slowly and doggedly, "but I also make it a rule to get my blow in at my own time of day. Look

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out for yourself, you young dog; you'll get it when you least expect it."

I said nothing, and he slouched on again for a yard or two, turned again, and came back. And this time he approached my guardian.

"As for you, Jervis Fanshawe, I've a bone to pick with you. You're responsible for this cub, and you've no right to let him loose about the country, interfering with honest men."

"Honest men, indeed!" sneered Fanshawe, getting a little behind me as he spoke.

"Yes—honest men," repeated the other. "I hope it doesn't touch you on the raw, Fanshawe," he added, with a grin. "And mark what I say: I'll have a kick at you for this night's work, and I'll begin now. I want my money within twenty-four hours."

"You know you can't have it," replied my guardian, in a voice that had suddenly changed.

"Very well—then I'll talk!" exclaimed Gavin Hockley, swinging round on his heel with a laugh, and striding off into the darkness.

I felt my arm gripped again; I looked round into a white distorted face that shocked and frightened me. If ever I saw murder in a man's eyes I saw it then.

"When next you strike him, Charlie—strike him hard," he whispered passionately in my ear. "When next you strike him—strike him dead!"

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CHAPTER III

HER WEDDING DAY

I WENT to London the next morning, something to the astonishment of my guardian, who protested feebly that there was nothing to take me away, and suggested that he needed my presence in the country. But I felt that my life, so far as Hammerstone Market was concerned, was closed; I did not ever wish to see the place again.

Let it not be thought for a moment, on account of my youth, that this was a mere boyish infatuation, out of which I should in time naturally have grown, remembering it at the best as only a tender boyish romance. It was never that; it had set its roots too deeply in the very fibres of my soul ever to be rooted up. I have heard that there are men like that, to whom love, coming early, comes cruelly—bending and twisting and torturing them, and creeping into their hearts, to cling there for ever. Such a case was mine; I have never been able to shake off that first impression, nor to forget all that her eyes seemed to say to me, on the terrace under the stars, when I kissed her hands, and bade her that mute farewell.

So I came to London, and went to my rooms, and set myself to work. I had fully made up my mind that this should not change my life; I had a purpose in view, in that I felt it was vitally necessary I should justify myself in her eyes, and justify her love for me.

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If I had sunk then in my own estimation, or had fallen away from the high ideals I had set up, so I felt must I have sunk before her, and fallen away from her. She was never to be anything to me, but she should feel that I had at least been worthy.

It must have been about a week after my return to London when my guardian came to me. My rooms were in a narrow street off Holborn, at the very top of a house; the chief room had a great skylight stretching over nearly half of it, making it a very excellent studio. I was at work there, getting the last of the light of the dying day, when he came in, and stood for a moment watching me, before I laid down my palette and went to greet him. I thought he looked thinner and more haggard even than before, and I thought that that nervous eager intensity in his face had increased. He just touched my hand with his, and then stood for a minute or so looking at the canvas. But when he spoke it was not of the picture.

"Have you seen anything of Hockley?" he asked abruptly, without looking at me.

"No; what should I see of him?" I asked in reply. "I have seen no one."

He gave a grim chuckle, and bent forward to look at the canvas more closely. Yet still he did not speak of the picture.

"He's left Hammerstone Market," he went on. "Made it a bit too hot to hold him, I fancy. And he's been saying mad things about me—and about you." He turned his head sharply, and looked at me, and repeated the words—"About you."

"It will not trouble me very much, whatever he says," I retorted.

"Don't be too sure; he's a dangerous man," said my guardian. "He'll talk about any one, and it's all lies. I shouldn't be surprised"—he turned to the

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picture again, and examined it—"I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he didn't say something more about me one of these days."

"I remember that I heard him threaten to talk," I remarked. "But surely a man in your position can afford to laugh at him and his threats?"

"That's where you're wrong," broke in Fanshawe quickly. "It's the men in my position that can have lies told about them, lies which they dare not refute. I tell you he's a dangerous man. More than that, he has been talking about—about somebody else."

He walked the length of the room, keeping his back to me, and examined another of my sketches. I felt my throat beginning to swell, and knew that the blood was rising to my face; controlling my voice as well as I could, I asked a question. "Who is—who is the somebody else?"

He turned round, and came towards me, keeping his hands locked behind him. "About Barbara—Barbara Patton," he said. "It seems he saw you that day in the woods—the day I was there. And Hockley is not the man to talk nicely about those things."

Jervis Fanshawe fell back a step or two as I came straight up to him; indeed, he unlocked his hands, and put up one of them as though to guard against a blow. "What did he say?" I asked; and my voice sounded unnatural.

He shook his head. "I'm not going to tell you; I'm the last man in the world to make mischief," he said. "You're a hot-headed boy, and I ought not to have told you. You'll get nothing more from me."

"Then I'll get it from him," I said, with a little grim laugh.

"That's your own affair entirely," said my guardian; and I thought he smiled in a peculiar way as he spoke.

As I strove to master my indignation, and so gradu-

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ally calmed myself a little, I came to the conclusion that Fanshawe had something more to say, and was seeking an opportunity to say it. He pottered about the studio for a time, stopping every now and then as if about to speak, and then moving on again ; at last he spoke to me over his shoulder.

"They're hurrying on the wedding a bit ; special licence, and all that kind of thing." Then, as I did not answer, he turned and asked sharply, "Do you hear what I say ? "

"Yes, I hear," I responded. "When is it to be ? "

"In about a fortnight's time. It's a whim of old Patton's to get the girl settled, and to know that she is safe. You'll be asked to go. You'll get a formal invitation, but I was to tell you from the old man that you were expected. Only a quiet wedding, of course."

Once again he started that ceaseless rambling round the studio ; once again he stopped. "You don't say anything about it," he exclaimed querulously. "I thought you were sweet in that quarter ? "

I looked at him quietly ; after a moment he dropped his eyes, and turned away. "You told me once," I reminded him, "that you intended to marry Miss Patton yourself."

"That was a business scheme that came to nothing ; I was forestalled. You were forestalled, too," he added. "I have not thought any more about it ; it was only a whim."

There was silence between us for a minute or two ; then I remembered something else, and spoke again. "You said it would mean red ruin to you if you did not marry her."

"Did I ? " He looked at me as though he did not see me, and as though he were thinking of something else. "I don't remember it ; at any rate, I didn't mean it in the sense you mean." He hesitated again,

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and then went on more passionately, with a rising inflection in his voice that startled me, as it had startled me once before with this extraordinary man. "On that day you met her in the woods, when she came to you, singing and with smiles, and walked and talked with you—oh, my God!—I had spoken to her in the same place—before you came at all."

The passion that consumed him was frightful; the recollection of what he had gone through, and what he had suppressed, shook and tore him like a storm. He clenched and unclenched his hands, and moistened his lips, and strove to speak; fought down that rising devil in him, and got himself calm again.

"She—she laughed at me." He beat the air before him, and swallowed hard, and stamped his foot, in a rage at himself that he could not control himself more easily. "I did not make—make love to her; I am not a boy. I told her that I wanted her, that I wanted to marry her. And then she—she laughed."

I could imagine the scene; and yet I think, if she had known all the deadly things that were to spring out of her light laughter in the wood that day—the lives that were to be shattered, and the souls brought into the dust—she might not have done it. She was but a child, and she did not know the man she had to deal with; he had meant to humble her, and she had humbled him too much.

He turned away, choking; although I despised the man, and although I remembered my own sorrow, I yet sorrowed for him. When he went on again he had got himself into some condition of calmness.

"Then I saw you in the woods, and I wondered that she should meet you as she did, because I knew you had not met before. It was your cursed youth," he broke out, his violence showing again for a moment—"you could speak to her with a voice that was not

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mine, and that I did not understand. That's all there is to say; I shall never speak of it again."

I did not know what to say, and so I thought it best to say nothing. Once more he made the circuit of the room, and once more he came back to me. Although I was silent, simply from lack of words, I knew instinctively that he felt himself to be a meaner thing than I was, because of his weakness and his rage, and that he hated me for that knowledge.

"I don't like the thought that you are not friends with Hockley," he said, as he came back to me, and laid his hand on my shoulder. "After all, this girl is going out of our lives, and will be nothing to us in the future. That bone of contention is gone, and I want you to meet Hockley. He's got a loose tongue, and he's not over nice in his manners; but he's not a bad sort. Say you'll meet him."

"I'd rather not," I said, with a remembrance of what the man must have said concerning Barbara and myself.

"You will be doing me a service, if you meet him, and treat him fairly," said Fanshawe, impressively. "Come, my dear boy," he pleaded, "I really want you to help me in a difficult matter. Swallow your pride, and meet the man."

"How shall I be helping you in that?" I asked.

"In a certain way—to a slight extent, that is—I am in his power," said my guardian. "Over a matter of speculation," he added hurriedly, "a little money I've lost."

I remembered that demand for money made by Hockley, and his threat when it was refused; I felt that I couldn't very well refuse to help the man who was the only real friend I had in the world. After a moment of hesitation, I grudgingly said that I would meet him, if Jervis Fanshawe wished.

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"That's right; that's good of you, Charlie," he exclaimed, with more fervour than I should have expected of him. "We'll have a little dinner together, and you shall see what a good fellow he is, when you really come to know him. And we'll keep off difficult topics," he added reassuringly.

On the evening appointed for the dinner I got to Fanshawe's rooms before Hockley had arrived; and I found my guardian in a strange humour, even for him. He made clumsy attempts to be facetious, and to throw off that rather grave reserved manner he usually wore; clapped me on the shoulder, and generally behaved like the really youngish man he was in years. Before Hockley came in he referred for a moment to that matter we had discussed in my studio; but he only touched upon it lightly.

"You mustn't think anything, Charlie, of what I said the other night about—about a certain subject," he said, standing in front of me, and nervously fingering the lapel of my coat. "I mean about—about Barbara Patton. I was never really in earnest, and you and I have something else to think about in the world beside girls, haven't we?"

I laughed a little foolishly, but made no direct reply. He went on with the subject eagerly.

"I've come to the conclusion that I've been taking life too seriously, Charlie; I've been too grave and careful. I'll blossom out a bit; we'll both blossom out." He laughed in an unnatural fashion, and clapped me on the shoulder again.

"By the way," I said, as a sudden thought occurred to me, "I've been wanting to talk to you a little about my affairs—money matters, you know. I'm getting hard up, and I don't quite know how I stand in regard to such things. My income ought to be a substantial one, but I want to know exactly how much it is."

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He always had an irritating way of speaking to any one over his shoulder, with his back to them and his head half turned; he adopted that method now. "Why should you trouble about your income?" he asked, a little sourly. "Don't you trust me?—don't you think you're safe in my hands?"

"Of course I trust you," I replied, a little indignantly. "But I want to know how much I can spend, that's all."

"Spend as little as possible," he said. "As a matter of fact, I've tied up your money in various ways, so that it may be safe; there's not much of it that can be handled at the moment. You shall have what you want—of course, within reason; but you must be careful—for your own sake."

I had no suspicion of him then; no doubt of him entered my mind. I knew nothing of business matters, and up to that time had always been supplied with the small sums necessary for my individual expenses, while all bills had, I believed, been sent to him. Nothing more was said about the matter then, because the entrance of Hockley drove everything else from my mind.

My guardian certainly seemed anxious to do all in his power to bring Hockley and me to a better understanding. He insisted on our shaking hands to begin with; and we performed that ceremony briefly and distrustfully. He hovered about us, and talked about our individual tastes, and wondered openly why we did not meet, or go about together.

"Two men like yourselves, with money and leisure, you ought to be friends," he asserted. "A poor devil like myself must be tied to his office chair willy-nilly; but you both are free. As for you, Hockley, why don't you take Charlie under your wing, and show him life and London?"

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"I've precious little time to give to other people," said Gavin Hockley.

"I have plenty to occupy my days," I said firmly.

Even that rebuff did not discourage my guardian; he went at us again at the earliest opportunity. He was quite merry at dinner, as we sat at that round table of his; and I noticed that he plied Hockley with wine on every possible occasion. For my own part, I usually drank but little; but that night I was in a reckless defiant mood, and I drank all that was given me. My head was spinning, and I was scarcely master of myself, when we got up from the table, and went into Jervis Fanshawe's sitting-room to smoke.

And there, something to my surprise, my guardian produced cards, and flicked them audaciously before the face of Hockley. I saw the man's eyes light up, as he snatched at the pack, and began to shuffle the cards.

"I thought you'd given up playing—at all events before the child," I heard him say, in a low tone.

I sprang up from my chair. "Who are you speaking of?" I demanded hotly.

"I wasn't talking to you," said Hockley, shuffling the cards slowly, and looking at me with those dull eyes of his. "If you chance to overhear what isn't meant for you to hear, that's not my fault."

"Now, gentlemen—gentlemen; I will not have it!" interposed Fanshawe hurriedly. "A joke's a joke, and should be taken as such; I won't have you flying at each other's throats in this fashion. We'll have a friendly game, and see if it won't mend our tempers."

I do not know what game we played; I knew only the simplest games at cards, and this was a complicated thing of which I knew nothing. My guardian laughingly assisted me when I got into muddles, and showed me how to score; but it seemed always

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that Gavin Hockley won. At all events he won from me, because presently I found, bitterly enough, that my pockets were empty. I saw the sneer that flitted across Hockley's face as my guardian thrust some money into my hand; I could cheerfully have killed him then.

We played until it was quite late, or rather early in the morning; and I lost everything. I know at the last my guardian dropped out of the game, declaring that he could not go on; but he urged me to have my revenge, and to see if the luck would turn. But it would not turn, and Hockley calmly pocketed all I had. I got up at last, with my head swimming and my eyes burning; and I faced him shamefacedly enough.

"You're in my debt, young Avaline," he said, coolly making a note on a slip of paper. "A small matter of thirty pounds odd."

I turned to my guardian; but he laughingly shook his head. "You've cleaned me out, Charlie," he said; "give our friend an I.O.U., and square up with him another time."

Humiliated and shamed, and inwardly raging, I wrote the thing, and tossed it over to Hockley. He laughed, and folded it up, and put it in his pocket-book. Even then the brutal mind of the man prompted him to have a further fling at me.

"I'm surprised you didn't win," he said. "You know the old saying 'Lucky at cards——'—well, I won't finish it."

I moved a step nearer to him. "What do you mean? I don't know any old sayings," I exclaimed, although I knew it well. "Explain yourself."

"The old saying is"—he grinned at me, and yet was watching me warily, I thought—"'Lucky at cards, unlucky in love.'" Fanshawe sprang between

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us just as I flew at my man ; wound his long arms about me, and thrust me back by main force. "I tell you I won't have it," he cried. "As for you, Hockley, you've got your money ; you can hold your tongue."

"The point is that I haven't got my money," said Hockley. "And I'm not quite sure that I ever shall get it."

A hot retort sprang to my tongue, but I checked it. I was in a false position ; I could not talk with this man until I had paid him what I owed. That should be to-morrow, when my guardian gave me what was due to me.

But it was to happen that to-morrow was to dawn, and other to-morrows, and Hockley was not to be paid. For Jervis Fanshawe put me off with one excuse and another : now he was too busy to go into the matter of my accounts ; and now he had no ready money ; and now he was engaged at his office, and I could not see him. In the miserable days that followed he doled out to me a sovereign or two, sufficient to keep me going ; but I got nothing else. My pride was up in arms, and I was maddened at the thought that Hockley had the laugh of me, horrified at the construction he would put upon my silence. I did not realize then, as I have realized since, how the thin and subtle net was closing in upon me, drawn tighter each day by the man who held the threads of it. I walked blindly towards a sure and certain goal, and never saw that goal until it was too late.

I do not now know what took me to Hammerstone Market for Barbara's wedding. Every instinct within me, as it seemed, fought against it ; I wanted to forget that I had ever been to the place at all, even while I jealously hugged the memory of the few precious minutes I had spent with her. Perhaps it was the thought that she was going for ever out of my life, and

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into the life of another man, that drew me down there for the last time; perhaps it was a sort of despairing hope that there might yet be a chance that we could stand together, hand in hand, and cry out the truth of our love, and defy those who were setting us asunder. That I knew, in my own mind, was impossible; because I was bound wholly by her, and knew, as surely as her eyes had told me, that our cause was hopeless. But I went down with my guardian; perhaps he had something to do indirectly with my final decision to go, because I knew that the fact of my presence there would for ever silence his tongue.

Barbara's wedding day! I have thought of it since, over and over again; have watched her, as in a dream, going down the dim little country church in the sunlight, with her head bent, while the man of the good-humoured face waited for her. I have seen them kneel, side by side, and have heard the solemn words pronounced over them; I have seen her come out again on the arm of her husband, pale as death, and with her head bent always, and her eyes seeking no one. Stay, I am wrong; for at the last she raised her head, and looked at me fully, seeming to know, indeed, instinctively where to find me. And with that look something in me broke and died; it was as though I had torn out my heart, and thrown it in the dust at her feet. She went on into the sunlight with her husband; and I presently followed mechanically with the others; hearing about me, as in a dream, the chatter and the laughter of the gay little crowd.

They were all very merry afterwards; I remember that there was an old-fashioned wedding breakfast, and much drinking of toasts, and some speeches. I know that Lucas Savell made rather a good speech in a way, and was very properly modest and grateful for his good fortune; I know, too, that old Patton was

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prosy and long-winded, and that towards the end of his speech a great many people were chattering together, and paying no attention to him. Then, after a time, it all broke up, and she was going.

I remember at the last I saw her coming down a wide staircase, with her bridesmaids fluttering about her and laughing; I think she had been crying. I know her eyes looked piteous, and her lips were quivering; but perhaps people thought that was quite the proper thing at a wedding, and with a young bride going away from home. Then, as she reached the foot of the stairs, she stopped for a moment to speak specially to one or two friends; and I was among the number. She put her hand in mine for a moment, and her lips formed the words "Good-bye"; but she could not speak. I stood there still as death; I wonder that no one noticed me. Then she was gone, and the crowd had broken up.

I found something in my hand; it was a tiny folded paper. I remember every word of it now; it was burnt in upon my brain, never to be effaced so long as I should live.

"Because I love you and trust you, I give you this, my dear, to read and then to burn. You will do that because I ask it. You have been very brave and very gentle with me; you are going always to be very brave and very gentle, so that I may carry that memory of you in my heart. I have thought of you in secret, although I shall do so no more, as my poor Prince Charlie—wandering alone, far from his kingdom; only, unlike the other poor Prince Charlie, you have no one to comfort you. Good-bye, you are not to think of me; and yet I pray that you may think of me a little. You will be my dream-love always.

BARBARA."

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I read it over and over until I had got it by heart—until, in fact, I knew every turn and twist of the dear writing; then I burnt it, and destroyed even the ashes. I was vaguely comforted by it; the thing was not so bitter as it might have been, because above all else I held her spirit, and she was mine in that sense, if in no other. And God knows at that time I had no other thought of her; I want that understood clearly, so that it may be understood, too, how little I deserved all that was to happen to me.

I walked about for a long time, and then I went back to the hotel; I had made up my mind to stay there for that night, and then to get to London. I have wished since, often and often, that I had gone straight back to that quiet life in town—that I had never stopped in that place until perforce I must stay the night.

My guardian had asked me earlier in the day about my movements, and I had told him that I intended to stop at Hammerstone Market. He seemed curious as to how I was going to spend the evening—seemed, indeed, anxious about me; so that I was not altogether surprised when he presently appeared in my room, and told me that he had arranged a supper party that night, and that he wanted me to be present.

"I'd rather stay quietly here, thank you," I told him brusquely. "I'm in no mood for supper parties to-night. Leave me alone."

He thrust his thin face close to mine. "You young fool, do you want everybody to be talking about you, and about her?" he demanded. "I was watching you in church to-day, and you looked like death itself. You don't know what these quiet country places are; there'll be whispers afloat to-morrow. Come, my boy—for her sake."

I looked at him in surprise; I had not expected for

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a moment that he would have thought of that aspect of the case. I began to feel that I had been mistaken in the man, and that there was really something rather fine about him. I suppose he saw the effect of his words, for he shook me rallyingly, and began to drag me out of the room.

"That's right, come along!" he exclaimed. "Keep a brave face, and no one can say a word. Come along!"

"Stop a bit!" I urged, drawing back. "Who's going to be there?"

"Only Hockley beside ourselves," said Fanshawe, examining his nails. "As a matter of fact, I want you to meet him again, and if possible get your revenge. I don't like that money hanging over."

"That's not my fault," I reminded him. "I've asked you again and again——"

"That's all right," he broke in soothingly. "I'll pay the money, and as much more as you like. This is going to be a lucky night for us both, Charlie; we're going to wipe off old scores."

He went down the stairs before me. On the way he glanced up to see that I was following, and it happened that the light from a lamp on the staircase fell on his face. And I remember that I did not like its expression.

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CHAPTER IV

THE KILLING OF THE LIE

MY story draws near now to that night of my life when all things for me were to change, and when I was to go down into the Valley of the Shadow, and come face to face with Death. I pray you hear me patiently, and believe that what I write is true of all that I felt and thought at that time. And God knows I have had years enough wherein to plan the writing of it—years of solitude and misery and exile!

I know that I felt again at that supper party the same curious premonition of a storm that I had felt in the house of old Patton. There were dreadful silences between the three of us—silences from which my guardian feverishly awoke us, or that were broken in upon by some coarse remark from Hockley. For my part I said little; I seemed to be watching and waiting; and I know now that I was alert and eager to snatch at anything the brute might say, and make much of it. Always I seemed to remember that it was Barbara's wedding day; and that I stood outside, like some pale pure knight of old, to guard her memory, and to be faithful to what she had said to me. And I knew always that the very atmosphere of the room and of the men who were with me was antagonistic to any purity of thought or feeling. From the very first I would have you understand that, from that point of view, I was a doomed man.

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The supper had been carefully ordered and was excellently served; for such guests the landlord insisted on waiting in person. Also the wine was good, and it circulated freely. I seemed to see, each time that I looked over the glass from which I drank, the two faces—that of Hockley, leering and heavy and brutal; that of my guardian, white and watchful and eager; and hovering always above us that suggestion of the storm to come.

Towards the close of the meal, Hockley raised his glass and stared across at me. "I give you a toast," he said, leaning forward over the table—"I give you the pretty bride!"

"Excellent!" exclaimed Fanshawe, springing up, and raising his glass. "The pretty bride!"

"The pretty bride!" I said hoarsely; and drained my glass, and, boylike, flung it into the fireplace, where it shivered to pieces. Hockley laughed as he set his own glass down on the table.

"The one toast—eh?" he suggested, with a sneer. "The fair lady would be honoured, I'm sure, if she knew. But she's nothing to us now, whatever she may have been."

"What do you mean by that?" I demanded, looking squarely at him.

"Don't take fire so readily," he retorted. "I mean that she belongs to another man, and I hope he thinks he's got a prize. Don't glare at me like that, my young friend," he added with a laugh; "I'd be the last to say anything against the lady."

"It would be better for you if you said nothing at all about her," I said; and he lay back in his chair, and roared with laughter.

"Come, come; we're getting on dangerous ground," broke in my guardian, laying a soothing hand on my shoulder. "Surely there's no harm in toasting a

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lady, as our friend Hockley has done; why should you be so ready to quarrel with him, Charlie?'

Hockley was still grinning in that unpleasant fashion of his across the table; I felt bitterly enough that he looked upon me as a tiresome, quarrelsome boy, and despised me in consequence. I chafed at the thought that in all probability I must presently play cards with him—perhaps to lose again; I chafed, too, at the thought that I was dependent on this other man, my guardian, for money with which to play at all. And even while I thought that, I had a vision of Barbara coming down the staircase at her father's house, with that look in her eyes as though she had been weeping, and with her lips quivering. Altogether a bad frame of mind for a boy of twenty to be in, with two such men for company.

The table was cleared at last, and then the cards were produced. With a burning face I drew my guardian aside, and spoke to him earnestly, believing that he had forgotten my request.

"I have no money," I said, "and I already owe this man a lot. You promised to let me have some; you promised to pay Hockley."

"My dear Charlie," he whispered, "do you imagine that I carry money about with me to that extent, and especially in a little country place like this? There are ten chances to one that you will win back to-night all that you have lost, and more; you won't get two such runs of bad luck in succession. Play on, and see how the game goes; I'll back you, whether you win or lose."

"I won't play to-night," I said doggedly. "I seem to be getting tangled in a net from which I shall never extricate myself; I'm getting afraid. I won't play to-night."

"You young fool!" he exclaimed, in a low voice,

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"do you want to give Hockley another handle to grasp. Do you want him to say that you owed him over thirty pounds, and wouldn't pay it, and wouldn't play again? Can't you understand what manner of man he is?"

I saw that there was nothing for it but to sit down with empty pockets, and to trust that my luck would change. For a time all went well; the cards all came my way, and I seemed to see the money I had lost flowing back into my pockets. More than once my guardian clapped me on the shoulder, and cheered me on, and rallied Hockley upon his ill-luck; Hockley set his teeth, and said nothing.

Presently I staked more than I should, and lost; staked again, and lost again. I saw Hockley's heavy jaw set firm, as he laid down card after card that beat mine and my guardian's; he never said a word, as we played on steadily in a silence which was growing oppressive. A bell had been rung and an order given, and some one had put a glass beside me; I was hot, and my throat was dry, and I eagerly gulped down what was there. And still the man before me, in a deadly silence, played his cards, and made notes on a slip of paper beside him.

I got up from the table at last, overturning my chair as I did so. Hockley was leaning back, with the slip of paper held before him, and with a pencil tapping out the figures on it. My eyes were burning, and something was singing in my ears; I scarcely knew where I was.

"Bad luck, Charlie," said the voice of my guardian, cutting the silence nervously.

"Mr. Hockley," I contrived to say, "I never meant to go on as far as this. I have no money—at least, not here; I can only give you my I.O.U. Will you please tell me how much it is?"

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He went on deliberately checking the figures; did not even look at me as he said the amount, yawning over it a little as he spoke. It was over seventy pounds; and I seemed to understand that my guardian owed him something also.

"I can only give you my I.O.U.," I repeated, as I drew a scrap of paper towards me, and steadied my hand to write.

"That's no good to me," he said, "not worth the paper it's written on. I've one already of yours, and what's it worth?"

"You will be paid," I said, with a helpless look at my guardian.

"If you play with gentlemen, why don't you pay like a gentleman," retorted Hockley, snatching at my scrap of paper, and getting to his feet. "I can't think what Fanshawe ever meant by bringing you into a man's business at all; this game isn't for boys."

"Be careful, Hockley!" I cried, making a movement towards him.

"To the devil with you!" he exclaimed violently. "I've had enough of your sour looks, and your threats, and your high-handed ways. Of course we're all sorry for you; you must be feeling a bit sore tonight," he sneered.

I controlled my tongue even then; I remembered the face of Barbara; I remembered the words of her note: "I love you and I trust you; you are going always to be very brave and very gentle, so that I may carry that memory of you in my heart." No such bully as this should break down my resolution; there was a power in me greater than he suspected.

It was my guardian who stirred the wound. "Why don't you be quiet, Hockley?" he said; "why don't you leave difficult subjects alone? The past is done with——"

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"And so's his pretty mistress," exclaimed Hockley. And it was not so much the words as the fashion in which he said them that maddened me.

Before Fanshawe could get to me I had overturned the table, and sprang at my man. He eluded me with a quickness I should scarcely have given him credit for, and slipped round behind my guardian; danced about there, in comparative safety, with mocking words and looks, keeping Jervis Fanshawe always between us. The situation was ridiculous, and I hesitated for very shame.

"Here's a fire-eater!" he cried, emboldened by the fact that I could not get at him, and that I stood chafing. "Owes a man money, and gives his dirty scrap of paper in exchange for it; and then will not have a word said against the girl who met him in secret in the wood. Hoighty toity—we're mighty particular!"

"I'll quarrel with you on any matter that your mean soul may choose—except that," I almost pleaded with him. "For your own sake as well as mine, leave her out of the conversation. She's as far above you as the stars; let your foul tongue wag about something else."

"My tongue shall wag as it chooses," he retorted, with a frown. "I know what I know, and I've seen what I've seen. You thought me asleep in the wood that day, didn't you?"

Again I saw the face of Barbara—first as she had come towards me smiling in the wood, then as she had come down the stairs, with her eyes on mine—eyes that had tears in them. And so I restrained myself, and waited there, helpless, until he should be silent.

"A fig for your saints and your Madonnas!" cried Hockley. "They're the worst of the lot. Our little

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meek-eyed Barbara was a lady of many loves—in secret. How did she meet you in the wood—you that had never met her before? How did she meet me—a dozen times before?"

"For the love of God, keep him quiet!" I cried to my guardian; for I felt that my head was bursting, and my throat was dry. I seemed then to be praying to the only saint I knew for strength and for confidence; I only wanted to get out of the room, before I struck the man dead. My guardian did nothing; he stood still, watching us both; and after a moment Hockley went on. I had a dim feeling, as he began to speak again, that people were moving outside the door; I think the place had been disturbed by the overturning of the table.

"That makes you wince, doesn't it?" he demanded; for I think he felt secure, now that other people were near at hand. "I tell you she was for any man that cared——"

I sprang straight at him then, and had him by the throat. I was young, and my muscles were tough; more than that, I was in finer condition than he, with all his drinking and his late nights and his vices, could hope to be. We went down together, he screaming out something that sounded like a cry for help; and I tore and raged at him as though I were mad.

When I came to myself, I was being held by three or four of them, and he was leaning against the overturned table, breathing heavily, and trying to arrange his collar and tie; his face was ghastly. After a moment he pointed a shaking hand at me, and gasped out—

"He tried to murder me; he meant to murder me. We were—we were joking, gentlemen—and he—he tried to murder me."

"Yes, I tried to murder you," I said. "And I'll

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try again, with more success, when I get the chance, unless you take back what you've said."

"Charlie—Charlie—come away!" exclaimed my guardian, putting his hands on my breast, and pushing me back. "I'm sorry to have disturbed all you good people," he added, turning to the landlord, who was staring at us with a scared face; "but this is only a matter of hot blood. They'll shake hands in the morning; they'll be friends again."

They were dragging me away, while I strove to break from them; I called out again to Hockley. "You shall take back what you said; I'll make you eat your lie, or I'll kill you."

I do not think I quite understood what I was saying; even the shocked scared faces about me could not make me understand the gravity of it all. I found myself outside the closed doors of the room, panting and almost weeping with excitement, with the stout landlord holding me on one side, and a waiter on the other. My guardian was speaking—not to me, but to the landlord.

"Very well, since you insist, he shall not stop in the house," said Jervis Fanshawe. "I'll take him away to Mr. Patton's place; I can secure a bed for him there. Yes—yes—I quite understand, and I'm sorry you've been disturbed; it shall all be put right. Tell Mr. Hockley that I've gone home."

They got me out of the house; locked the door on me, in fact. I stood under the stars with Fanshawe, staring before me down the road, and panting heavily; for I knew that this was but the beginning. I seemed to see the foul lips of the man for ever breathing out lies about her—lies that must be stopped and killed now in their birth. That was what I must do, and quickly. This thing would be spread; I seemed to see the man whispering it here, there, and everywhere,

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with shrugs and leers and winks. Yes, I would kill it.

As in a sort of dream I heard my guardian talking to me. "Yes, my dear boy; I know it's abominable —shameful; but what can you do? Any one who knows you and knows her must know that it is all a lie from beginning to end. There—there—come away. I suppose if we lived in any other century, you might strike a man down for this; I think I should strike him down myself, if I were as young and strong as you are." He was glancing at me curiously as we stood there in the utter silence of the night; there seemed a challenge in his eyes. And his suggestion about any other century had brought back again to my mind the remembrance that I was her pure knight, pledged to do battle for her. I began to walk rapidly away in the direction of the house of the Pattons, with my guardian walking beside me, and putting in a word here and there that was meant to be soothing, and yet that only served to inflame my passion.

"I ought not to have said that about striking him down, Charlie; that would be murder," he went on. "And one may not murder another man, however much one may be tempted, or however richly the man may deserve death. But the worst of it is, of course, that one doesn't know how to stop him; he'll go on saying those things about that sweet girl, and people will begin to believe—to say there's no smoke without fire, and horrible things of that sort. What had we better do, Charlie?"

"You can leave it to me," I said. "You can safely leave it to me."

He seemed to be able to do what he liked at the house of the Pattons. A manservant let us in; my guardian seemed to whisper something to him to account for my dishevelled appearance, and for the

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fact that I had no hat. The man got a light in one of the lower rooms, and presently brought in a decanter and some glasses; then, at a further whispered suggestion from Fanshawe, retired and left us alone together. My guardian was hovering about me anxiously—now murmuring what a shame it was that such things should be said openly about such a girl as Barbara—now muttering what he would do if he were a younger man—now urging me feebly to forget all about it, and leave the man alone.

"Above all, Charlie—no violence," he said. "I shudder to think what you might have done if I had not prevented you to-night. You won't mend things that way; we must think of some other method."

I said nothing; I drank mechanically what he put into my hand; I acquiesced in his suggestion that I should go to bed. My last recollection of him was when he came into my room, looking thinner and more gaunt than ever in a dark dressing gown, and hovered over me with a candle, and hoped that I would sleep.

But sleep was not for me that night; I had other things to think about. The lie faced me, like a grey haunting shadow, in the night; had become more horrible with the first streaks of dawn. The more I strove to control myself—the more I told myself that what such a creature as Hockley might say could not matter—the more my passion grew. And it was a worse passion now, because there was growing up in it a method that was greater than the madness of the night before. In that long night, wherein I lay and thought the thing over, the boyish part of me seemed to have lived far back in another age; it was a new Charles Avaline that rose with the morning, and dressed and went out.

I know that I walked into the hotel at Hammerstone Market quietly enough; I was half way up the stairs

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leading to my room before the startled landlord came out, and called after me to know where I was going. I turned, and faced him on the stairs.

"I'm going to my room to put my things together," I answered. "Is Mr. Hockley up yet?" I steadied my voice, and made the question as careless as I could.

"Mr. Hockley's gone, sir," said the man, in what was evidently a tone of satisfaction.

I came down the stairs, and faced him for a moment in silence. "That's not true," I said quietly; "he's afraid to meet me, and you're hiding him."

"Thank the Lord, sir, he's gone," said the man earnestly. "I didn't like the look of you last night, sir; and I like the look of you still less this morning. No offence, sir, but I'll be glad when you're out of my 'ouse."

I packed my bag, and arranged for it to be sent to the station; then I tramped back to find my guardian. I found him seated at breakfast, quite alone; Mr. Patton had not yet come down. I told him that I had been to the hotel, and that Hockley was gone. I think he seemed surprised, and a little taken aback at the news.

"Well, what are you going to do?" he asked, after a silence, during which he had been twisting his long fingers about over each other nervously. "Are you going to let the matter drop, or what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to follow him; I'm going to find him," I said. "You know where he lives in London; you must give me the address."

"I won't do that," he replied instantly; "I'll have no hand in this business. Let him say what he likes, or do what he likes; it's no affair of mine, and it should be no affair of yours. I wash my hands of it."

He went on with his breakfast again, muttering to

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himself something about young hot-headed fools; I waited patiently. I brushed aside his suggestion that I should have some breakfast; I was impatient to be gone. I told him again that I must have Hockley's address.

"Look here, Charlie," he said at last, "I'm going to London by a train which leaves in half an hour; you can come with me. We'll talk over this matter in the train, and I'll see if I can't bring you to a more sensible frame of mind."

To that I agreed, and we presently started together for the station. During our journey I urged two things upon him: that I must have sufficient money to pay my debt to this man, and that I must have this man's address. He flatly refused to let me have the address; the money he said he would forward to Hockley himself.

"You promise that?" I asked eagerly.

"I'll send him a cheque directly I reach the office," he replied earnestly.

I urged him again to let me know where the man lived, but he would not. Finally, however, he said he would think the matter over; if I would call at his office in the City that evening, he would let me know his decision. With that I had to be content; and I left him at the station, and after taking my luggage to my rooms, set off to kill the day as best I could.

I reached Jervis Fanshawe's office in the late afternoon, to find that he was gone. But he had left a note for me; I tore it open, and read it there.

"I have sent a cheque to Gavin Hockley to cover the full amount you are indebted to him. I enclose his address, because I think that you are the best judge of what you should do. "J. F."

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I tore the note up, having got that address clearly in my mind, and set out to find Hockley. I remember now that a curious calm had come over me—a curious feeling of deadly certainty as to what I wanted, and what I meant to have. I was no longer in his debt; I could stand face to face with him on absolutely equal terms. And I would have you bear in mind that I did not mean to kill him.

No—I did not mean to kill him. There was a thought in my mind that I might beat him to his knees, and force him to say the truth; that I might compel him, in fact, to write it down: nothing more than that. But my rage and my abhorrence had grown into a deadly thing, more dangerous than the passion of the night before; I did not know then what I have recognized since, that I had no real control of myself, and that I had sprung as it were, in one single instant, above any law that might be made by man. And I was in that condition when, in the coming gloom of the evening, I turned into Lincoln's Inn Fields, and looked for the place where Gavin Hockley lived.

It was a curious old house, with a great flagged courtyard in front of it; it had once been the house of some great man, before Lincoln's Inn had been invaded by lawyers and others in search of chambers and offices. I read his name on a plate at the door; I climbed the stairs, and as I climbed I slowly unbuttoned my gloves, and took them off. I had no weapon of any sort, save a light walking cane that would have snapped at a touch.

I came to the door of his rooms, and read his name there again.

My heart was beating a little more rapidly than usual, but I was outwardly calm. I saw that the door was open an inch or two; without knocking, I thrust

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it open, and went in. The place was empty. Judging at first that he had seen me coming, and had bolted I made a quick movement towards the door of the room in which I stood, with the intention of setting out in pursuit; and at that moment heard the outer door bang, and heard him come in, whistling. I stood still, just within the door of his sitting-room, and waited for him.

He came straight into the room, looking neither to right nor left; it was only as he swung about at the table that he saw me. I stood quite still, watching him, and for a moment I saw flash up in his eyes the look of a hunted creature at bay. He had stopped, with his hands resting on the table; he seemed to crouch there, waiting. I made a rapid movement, and got between him and the door.

"What do you want?" he asked at last, straightening himself, and putting his hand for a moment to his collar. I thought then that perhaps he had a difficulty in breathing, or perhaps he remembered my hands there on the previous night.

"You ran away from me this morning, because you were afraid of what I might do to you," I said steadily. "You can't run now; you've got to face me, and answer me, and do as I tell you."

"Oh, indeed!" He was getting a little of his courage back by this time, and some of his old air of bravado sat awkwardly enough upon him. "And may I ask what the devil you mean by forcing your way into a gentleman's rooms like this?"

"I had to meet you, and I chose the only way that was open to me," I replied. "I went to look for you this morning, but you had by that time decided that it was wiser to get out of my way. I want you to take back the lie you told last night."

I saw him look quickly round the room; I glanced

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for a moment round myself. I knew that his eyes sought a weapon; I knew that if he could frighten me out of the place, or overawe me in any way, he would laugh at anything I might threaten, and that my chance would be gone. He made a movement as if to get past me; I stood still, looking at him. The momentary glance round the walls had shown me that the place was very beautifully furnished, and that weapons of various sorts were fastened about, for the mere purpose of ornamentation. I saw that it would become a question as to which of us secured a weapon first; but even then, as I did not mean to kill him, I did not make the first move. That I will swear.

When he moved, it was to snatch a weapon that seemed characteristic of his clumsy brutality; he suddenly swooped and caught up a heavy poker from the fireplace. "It was no lie, and you know it," he blurted out. "Every one knows it, if it comes to that. Get out of my place, you cub, until you can pay your debts."

"Stay where you are!" I commanded him. "My debt is paid; a cheque has been sent you to-day. For the last time, will you take back what you have said, or shall I kill you?"

He suddenly made an ugly rush at me, swinging the poker above his head. He was blind with fury and fear; he did not seem to know where he struck. I sprang aside, and on the instant wrenched from its place on the wall a short old-fashioned heavy-bladed sword. I waited until he should turn to come at me again; and when he did his lips were spluttering out words and oaths so frightful, with her sweet name mixed horribly with them, that I felt I had no option. I struck down his weapon, and I drove straight at his head with my own. I struck him twice with all my

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force, and saw him drop to his knees, and then on to his side. And so lay, as in my dream, with blood upon him at my feet.

I turned round, and walked out of the place. Somehow it did not seem surprising that on the staircase I should meet my guardian, Jervis Fanshawe. He was trembling from head to foot; he took hold of my arm, and asked me in a shaking voice to tell him for the love of God what I had done.

"I've killed Gavin Hockley—and his lie," I said. Then I went quietly down the stairs, and out into the summer twilight of Lincoln's Inn Fields.

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CHAPTER V

ALAS! FOR POOR PRINCE CHARLIE!

IN a great crisis of one's life perhaps the things that strike one most are those most commonplace. I remember on that summer evening, when I came out into the streets, that I was able to think first of the extreme beauty of the night, and of how quaint and wonderful the old buildings looked in the softened light of the dying day. I saw a pair of lovers strolling on before me, looking into each other's eyes; I remember thinking then, with a little strange feeling of pride, that I had killed a man that Love and Truth might live. I had come out into Holborn, and was making my way towards my rooms, when my guardian, who had hovered a little behind me, and had followed me wonderingly, touched me on the arm. I had forgotten all about him until that moment.

"Better come home with me," he whispered; "they'll look for you at your place first."

"It won't make much difference," I said; "they'll have to find me some time." Nevertheless I went home with him, walking the short distance to his place in Bloomsbury.

He watched me as we went along, and I saw that he watched me with an increasing sense of wonder. I was something detached—apart from all the world—something he had not looked upon before. He was afraid of me, and yet attracted to me in a fearful

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way; he spoke to me, when he spoke at all, with a strange deference. I wondered about it, as I might have wondered about anything that was happening to some other person, until at last it struck me, and that with no sense of fear, that he looked upon me as one already dead. And so we came to the house in which he lived, and went up in silence to his rooms.

He turned up the light in that room in which we had played cards, and motioned to a chair; but I did not sit down. Now that I could see his face distinctly, I read again in it that look of fierce and eager excitement that I had seen before; I understood, too, that I was nothing to him, and only what I had done made me important in his eyes. I had something to say to him, and I said it quickly.

"He told me that he had not yet had the money to redeem my I.O.U.'s," I said. "I suppose the cheque was delayed?"

"It wasn't sent," he said in reply. "I never meant to send it."

I turned on him fiercely, and spluttered out his own words: "Never meant to send it? What do you mean?"

"You don't want to murder *me*," he muttered, putting the table between us, and grinning weakly. "I tell you I never meant to send it—I never had the money to pay it."

I sat down and looked at him; the horror of the other business was falling away from me in the contemplation of this treachery. "I want you to explain," I said patiently.

"You young fool!" he exclaimed with sudden violence, as he saw how tame and quiet I was, "don't you understand that I meant this to happen from the first? Don't you understand what every one is going to say when they find him, and when they find

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what is in his pockets? You owed him money; you had been gambling with him, and had nothing to pay him with. You quarrelled with him at Hammerstone Market; you were heard to threaten to kill him. You follow him to his rooms; he demands the money; there is a quarrel, and the stronger and the younger man wins. Oh, you fool!"

"Why have you done it?" I asked him, still very quietly.

He paced about the room for a minute or two, and then came back to me. I knew that there was time enough, and so I waited; I did not see daylight yet.

"I have been in Hockley's clutches for years," said Jervis Fanshawe, speaking in a matter-of-fact tone; "he has bled me steadily for a long time past. I began gambling with him, and I lost; tried to retrieve my losses, and lost more. Every penny I ever had has gone to him—and other money besides."

"What other money? Mine?"

He nodded slowly. "Every bit of it, and more besides that. I'm deeply involved with the firm; that was my chief reason for trying to get hold of that girl, for with her I could have stopped all tongues wagging, and could have paid Hockley off. It was when I saw you, hot-headed and hot-blooded, and only too eager to quarrel with the man, that the idea came into my mind that I might use you. That—and the story I heard."

I remembered in a flash the story the doctor had told at that dinner party at the house of old Patton; of the man who worked on the jealous feelings of another that he might kill a third man. But my mind moved slowly, and even yet I did not even quite see what this man had done.

"I can tell you this now, because you're a dead

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man to all intents and purposes," said Jervis Fanshawe, leaning across the table and looking hard at me. "I always hated you—hated you, I think, for your youth and your strength, and that fair boyish face of yours that gave you a chance with women I never had. You've served my purpose, and in a way I never expected."

"Then, when they bring me to justice—when they try me for what I have done," I said slowly and patiently, "that is the story you will tell them?"

"Undoubtedly," he replied. "And you cannot contradict it."

"I would not contradict it if I could prove the truth to every one," I assured him earnestly "And I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

He stared at me in amazement. "Are you mad?" he gasped.

I shook my head, and smiled. "No, I'm not mad," I replied. "Only this gives me the chance I never hoped to get—the chance to keep her name out of it. I was afraid you might drag that in, tell of the quarrel between Hockley and myself, and have sharp lawyers turning and twisting that lie this way and that. Tell your tale, by all means; I shall keep silent. Now give me something to eat; I'm faint and worn out."

I do not think he had understood me before; I caught him more than once stopping, as he moved about the room, to look back at me, and to ponder over me and to shake his head. I was indifferent to everything; I only thought how wonderfully it had all come about, that Barbara's name would never be mentioned; I had not hoped to kill the lie so completely as this. I ate the food he gave me, and presently lay down on the hard horsehair sofa in his sitting-room, and was fast asleep in a minute. I only woke once during the night, and then I found him

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bending over me with a flaring candle held above his head; there was still that wondering awestruck look in his face.

I went out long before he was awake in the morning; I had not yet decided what I should do. That it would be done for me pretty quickly I already realized; for it was not likely, after his declaration of the previous night, that Jervis Fanshawe would long leave me at liberty. So I took what was to prove my last walk through London, for that time at least; and presently saw what I had expected to see. Flaring lines on newspaper placards told me and all the world of London what had happened, and the lines were strengthened as hour after hour went by. In face of them I had a curious satisfaction in my present liberty, a curious wonder at the power that was mine. I could have gone up to any respectable citizen jogging along his respectable way, and have told him the truth calmly; I could have shouted it in the streets, and then have run, with a hundred at my heels. I was a pariah, walking the streets of a great city with men hunting for me; I had nothing in common with respectability or decency.

I remember that I tried experiments that day; touched the very fringe of what was waiting for me, in a sense, to try how near I could go to the actual danger without grasping it. I sat in a crowded restaurant at lunch time, and heard men talk of what had happened, giving details of how the man had been struck down, and offering suggestions as to the motive. I that was already dead could listen to them with equanimity; could wonder a little what would have happened had I suddenly declared how much deeper my knowledge of the business was than theirs.

One man was quite blatant about it; he had already formed his own idea of the matter, and had summed

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it up. There was a woman in it, of course; everything pointed to the fact that a woman had struck the fatal blow. In the first place there was no evidence of any struggle; and mark you, gentlemen, a woman bent on such a business as that would creep upon the poor devil unawares, and strike him down before he had a chance to defend himself. It being pointed out to this clever person that a poker had been found clasped tight in the hand of the murdered man, he was ready in a moment with a smiling explanation of that. The woman had put it there, the better to make out her defence if necessary. He was quite surprised that no one had thought of that.

So I went out into the streets again, to find again what I had expected. The placards bore an additional line—"A Clue." Clearly Mr. Jervis Fanshawe had already been at work.

There was no thought in my mind of escape; I do not think that idea ever occurred to me. Once or twice, perhaps, a hot and pitiful feeling swept across me at the thought that I must pay for what I had done with my life—and I so young! But even then I thought of myself as of some one impersonal and having nothing to do with me. That was the strangest feeling of all: to tread these streets, amid these hurrying crowds, and to feel so bitterly sorry for poor Charlie Avaline, whose life was ending. But of myself I did not think.

It was growing dark as I turned into the little narrow street out of Holborn in which my rooms were situated. Against the railings of a house opposite to that in which I lived a man lounged; as I came into the street he was making a business of lighting a pipe. Twenty yards away, on the opposite side of the road, a policeman was standing; I saw that here was the end of things. As I turned into the street a wretched,

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forlorn old woman, with a box of matches in her hands, shambled past me, mumbling something pitifully; I stopped her, and gave her all the money I had in my pocket—all I had in the world. I left her looking blankly at the coins, and feeling about her deplorable clothes for some place in which to hide them; then I walked straight up to the house, and climbed the stairs; and knew, while I climbed, that the man who had made a pretence of lighting a pipe climbed steadily behind me.

I was so young, and life even then was so sweet, that for a minute after I had gained my room, and while yet freedom was left to me, I made shift to clasp my hands and murmur a prayer for strength. I heard the Law, in the shape of the man with the pipe, on the landing outside, and for the first time I was afraid; the passion and the fierceness of the thing had gone from me. I dropped my head upon my hands, and whispered what was in my heart—

"Let me be strong and brave; let me never speak her name. Let me die silent—oh, God!—let me die silent!"

There was a sharp knock at the door; I pulled myself together, and went to open it. The man was inside in a moment and had closed it, but not before I had had time to look past him, and to see the grim figure of the policeman standing outside. I think at first the man who had come in, and who now announced himself, was a little astonished at my youthful appearance; he asked if my name was Charles Avaline. Even as I answered him, I felt myself vaguely wondering what he was like in private life, and if he had a son, perhaps, of about my age; for he was a pleasant-looking man of about fifty.

"My name is Charles Avaline," I said steadily.

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"I have a warrant for your arrest, Mr Avaline," he said, "and I charge you with the murder of Gavin Hockley last night in his rooms in Lincoln's Inn Fields." Then, as I was about to speak eagerly, he interrupted me in a fashion I shall always remember, because it was so kindly—almost paternal, in fact. Yes, I felt sure he must have a boy of about my age.

"Now, my dear boy, don't say anything," he urged. "You know what it means; I shall only have to use it in evidence against you. I see you're a gentleman—I might have known that by the first look at you—and I know you're coming, like a gentleman, quietly. You can leave it to me; I'll see that everything is as comfortable and as sparing to your feelings as can be, consistent with my duty."

"I will give you no trouble," I said. Then, before he could stop me, I added quickly: "And I did kill the man."

He shook his head despondently. "I wish you hadn't said that, but I'm bound to repeat it," he said. "I always like a man to have a fair chance if I can. Now, sir, if you're ready we can start."

I looked round the studio in which I had been for so short a time; I thought of all the dreams I had dreamed there, of all that I was to have done to make a great name in the world. I felt that the man was watching me, and yet he had in his eyes something of that wondering perplexed look that I had seen in the eyes of my guardian. I walked out on to the staircase, where the policeman was still standing, and the man I had left in the room extinguished the light and followed me. He motioned to the constable to go ahead of us; when we got into the street a cab was just drawing up. I got in, and the man followed; the constable swung himself up to the box beside the driver, and we set off.

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I do not think I was surprised to find my guardian hovering about in the hall of the police station; the only point that was remarkable was that he was nervous and anxious, and I was not. I think, in view of what I had to face, and of the desperate strait I was in, I looked upon him then as something so much smaller and meaner and more commonplace than myself. Not that I would have you believe that I regarded myself in any heroic light, but rather that I had done with this troublesome business of life, had fought my fight, and was going out into the shadows. And yet was so sorry, so desperately sorry for poor Charlie Avaline!

"My dear boy!" he began, as I walked into the place; but I checked him with a laugh as I thrust him aside.

"You've managed it more promptly than I should have thought possible," I said. "You'd much better go home."

I pass over all that happened before my trial. If I seem to touch upon it at all, or to endeavour to make you understand what were my thoughts at that time, it is only because of the old human instinct that every man and every woman has to justify what he or she has done. And at that time I suppose my chief thought, naturally enough, was of what the end would be for poor Charlie Avaline; of what people would say to him and about him; of how much he could bear, and whether, in the stress of the time that was coming, he could keep silent. But on that latter point I felt pretty certain, and was not afraid.

So the day came when I stepped up through the floor, as it seemed, and came out into a railed-in space, and faced my judge. I seemed to hear about me a rustling and a murmur that died down at once. I saw near to me the man who held my life in his hand,

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in the sense that he was so hopelessly to defend me; I caught sight of my guardian, seated near to me, with lips twitching, and with his white fingers coiling over each other ceaselessly. And then in the silence a voice asking me how I pleaded.

"Guilty!"

There was a great excitement then, with my counsel excitedly whispering to me, and people murmuring in court; it seemed that I had outraged all the legal technicalities. Why could they not be done with it at once, and take my word for what had happened? I did not want to be set up there, to be stared at and pointed at; I had done with the world, and they had but to pass sentence upon me. I was tired of the sorry game; I wanted to go down the steps again quickly, and be lost to the world.

But it seemed that there was much to be done. My plea was amended; legally, it appeared, I was not guilty after all until I had been tried. And in that mock fashion (for so it seemed to me) I was tried on that dreadful charge, and all the sorry story was gone into again.

The court was packed; I remember noticing that there were many women present. I looked at the jury; and in that curious fashion in which small things appeal to us in great crises, I noticed one man with a bald head and a mild and innocent-looking face; I thought he seemed a little sorry for me, and I wondered about him, and longed to tell him that it did not matter, and that he need not be afraid of my feelings when he came to give his verdict. I felt quite anxious about that little innocent-looking juryman; I would have been so glad to comfort him.

It seemed that they had a great many people there I had forgotten. There was the landlord of the hotel at Hammerstone Market, and a waiter and a chamber-

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maid; they had come to give evidence to the effect that they had heard me threaten to kill this man, and that they had broken in upon our struggles. The chambermaid was a young and pretty girl, who wept as she gave her evidence, and persisted in referring to me as "the young gentleman," despite their protestations that I should be dubbed "the prisoner." Then they all seemed to fade into the background, and my guardian stood to give evidence against me.

An unwilling witness this, my lord; a man dragged here by the stern arm of a subpœna to give evidence against this young man, whose friend and guardian he has been; you must not be surprised, my lord, if he should break down! He has tried hard to shield the prisoner already; such knowledge of the crime as he possessed has only been dragged out of him with great difficulty. Bear with him gently, my lord, and gentlemen of the jury, for his position is truly a pitiful one!

Mr. Jervis Fanshawe answered the first question in so low a tone that it was difficult to hear him. He had loved this boy, it appeared, as he might have loved a son of his own; he had watched his growing up, and had provided him with everything that was necessary for his proper education and for his placing out in the world. But he had noticed from the first a tendency on the part of this misguided boy to leave the beaten safe paths, and to take his own way in the world. The modest fortune entrusted to that guardian's care for the boy had long been exhausted, and Mr. Fanshawe had only too willingly paid certain expenses out of his own pocket.

I looked at him keenly then, and he lowered his eyes; but as he shook his head despondently at the same time, it was naturally concluded that he had long since come to the belief that there was not much to be done for me.

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He was asked to come to the events of that night at the inn at Hammerstone Market, and he did so with reluctance. There had been bad blood between these young men, and he had endeavoured to put things right between them. He had given a modest supper, and had hoped that they would shake hands afterwards and be friends. Unfortunately, however, they had started again that business of card-playing that had been the original cause of the trouble between us.

"I take it, Mr. Fanshawe, that you were aware that this I.O.U.—I refer to the first one—had been given by your ward to the dead man."

"I saw it written," was the answer.

"And the second one was given on the night before the murder?"

"Under similar circumstances—yes," replied Fanshawe.

It further came out, under skilful examination, that this worthy Mr. Jervis Fanshawe had actually got the prisoner away to London, and had refused to reveal the whereabouts of Gavin Hockley; had only yielded, in fact, under the belief that the two young men were to make up their differences. I watched him closely during this time, but he avoided my eyes as much as possible, and gave his evidence in short jerky sentences; I believe it was felt that he was labouring under strong emotion.

My counsel had before him a task that was hopeless enough. I would tell him nothing save that I had killed the man; I was deaf to all his pleadings. He could only do what was in his power to upset the evidence that had been given; he started on a track with my guardian that amazed and frightened me.

"You went down to Hammerstone Market, Mr. Fanshawe, with your ward, to attend a wedding?"

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he began. "Can you tell us if the prisoner had any interest in any way in that wedding?"

"He knew the parties, as I did," replied my guardian.

"There was no possibility of any quarrel having arisen out of any jealous motive?"

I held my breath, and wondered what the man would say. He glanced at me for a moment; I do not exaggerate when I say that he cowered beneath the look I gave him.

"I do not understand the question," he said. "The people were intimately known to me, but were mere acquaintances of the prisoner."

There came the speech of the prosecuting counsel. This young man, of good education and good prospects, had gambled recklessly with another man, and had found himself in an impossible position. He might have gone, gentlemen of the jury, with confidence to this guardian, who was his best and his dearest friend, and have appealed to him to liquidate his debt; instead of that it was evident that he had determined to try conclusions with the man who held these incriminating scraps of paper. What passed behind the closed doors of the unfortunate man's rooms it was impossible to say; they could only conjecture. It must, however, be suggested that the prisoner, terrified at the thought of the position in which he had placed himself, had gone late at night to the rooms of the man to whom he owed this considerable sum of money; they might imagine him pleading with that man, then threatening and demanding, then endeavouring to obtain by force that which he could obtain in no other way. It might be urged that these papers had been found upon the dead man, but surely that could easily be accounted for. Even the most callous could scarcely stoop to search the blood-stained thing that lay in that quiet room at night.

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My counsel did the best for me that he could; he threw himself, alike with me, upon the mercy of the court. I had refused to say anything; he confessed that he was utterly in the dark as to my motive. But he could plead my youth, and the fact that Gavin Hockley was a bigger and apparently a stronger man, with a reputation that was not too clean. Was it not possible that these two hot-headed men—the prisoner a mere boy—had got into some quarrel, and had attacked each other without thought; had not a weapon been found in the hand of the dead man? This could be no question of murder; there was nothing deliberate about it at all.

I remember that the judge summed up dead against me. He disagreed with the suggestion that the act was not premeditated; there were the various attempts I had made to get the address of my victim; the determination I had shown; my threats to kill the man, if I could only stand face to face with him. The duty of the jury was clear; unless they had any reasonable doubt there was but one verdict they could return. It was all short and sharp and direct to the point; the jury went out of court, and I remember that the little innocent-faced one looked back at me pityingly as he went. I almost called out to him not to mind.

It did not take them long to consider their verdict; I was hurried back into court within a few minutes. The usual formal questions were asked; and for a moment my heart beat a little quicker as I heard the verdict given. It was the one I had already given myself.

"Guilty!"

For a moment there was a sort of mild tumult in court; people whispering and jostling about, and here and there a voice raised—either in protest, or in condemnation of me; I do not know which. Then

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silence; and another figure on the bench, a little behind the judge, adjusting a black square of cloth upon his wig. I remember thinking, in an absurd way, that he had not put it on quite straight.

The judge had already lifted his hand impressively, and had spoken my name, when the voice of a woman rang out clearly in the gallery above me. It was as though some tender-hearted creature there could not bear that this thing should be done.

"Oh, God!—no—no—no!"

She was silenced at once, and the solemn voice that had begun to address me went on with what it had to say. It had been, it seemed, a revolting crime—born of a man's evil passions; it must meet the penalty set out in the law. The recommendation of the jury to mercy on account of my youth should be forwarded to a proper quarter; but the duty of the judge now was clear. I listened patiently until the last words came to me across the hushed court—

"And may God have mercy on your soul!"

I stood still for a moment, and looked about me over that sea of faces, all turned, without exception, in my direction. The little juryman was dabbing at his eyes, without any attempt at concealment; my guardian was watching me, with nervous fingers plucking at his lips. Then it all faded, like a dream that was ended, and I went swiftly down out of the world.

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CHAPTER VI

I LEAVE THE WORLD

ALTHOUGH in my uneasy slumbers I killed Gavin Hockley a hundred times at least—saw him lying at my feet, and realized clearly what I had done—I cannot say that such hauntings filled me with any horror in my waking moments. The thing had been done, and I had the savage certainty that it had been done well. Almost it seemed to me that I had gone before the woman I loved, and cleared the path for her—striking out of my way and hers the noxious thing that had menaced her. That was well done, and the path was clear; what else could matter?

It would be idle to suggest that I did not think about my fate. So many days in which to live, and with each morning one the less; so many times to look upon the faces of those who guarded me; so many meals to be got through; that was all. Then would come that last dreadful morning when they would wake me; when I would get, perhaps, a glimpse of the sunshine for which I longed, and would hear the passing bell; then—"to hang by the neck until you are dead."

In the time that was left me I travelled many, many miles. I seemed to see myself in a sort of perspective, narrowing down to the years that I could first remember, when I had been a child. I saw myself a happy boy at school; remembered the names of other happy

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boys, who would read of my fate, and shudder at what I had done; for I had been regarded as a gentle, amiable creature at school; I do not think I had ever even fought a boyish battle. They would talk about me—would say: "Why, I knew this chap at school!" and so would gain some temporary notoriety from the knowledge.

I remembered again a happy year or two in an old-fashioned German town; thought with tears of loyal brave friendships formed then—friendships that were never to be broken this side the grave. How we had mapped out then all we were to do—this man a writer, and this other a painter, and this stronger one a soldier! And then I fell to wondering in what obscure place within the prison they would bury me—for my bones to be found afterwards—long, long afterwards; when perhaps they might recall how young I was, and how brutal my crime.

I think they were all sorry for me; I know that they were gentler with me than with other prisoners. Once or twice the man who had prepared my defence came to see me; it seemed that they were preparing a great petition, to save me if possible from the gallows. I protested against that; it was not what I wanted. No living death for me, herded with criminals for the rest of my days; let me walk out as bravely as I could, and face the penalty. I protested strongly against the suggestion that I should be given any other fate than that I had earned. Nor would I in any way give them help for the framing of their petition; they had heard the evidence, and it was true—and what more did they want?

They plagued me to such an extent that at last I refused to see the man at all; but still I understood that the petition went on, and was being signed widely everywhere. I was so young—and, God help me!—

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so good-looking, they told me—that there was every reason for the hysterical outpourings of sympathy; had I been old and hardened, never a word would have been said.

The good chaplain I listened to—hearing the simple comforting words that I had heard many and many a time in the old days at school. It seemed strange that I should hear them now, in this place, where I was shut away until the time came for them to kill me! My life had been clean and wholesome—there was nothing very heavy that I had to carry before my God, save that slaying of a fellow-man. And it seemed more than possible that God would understand.

The long days dragged themselves out, until there were but three left. I was in a mood to wish that they might hurry the business on; I had begun dreadfully to count the days, and then the hours; and there was a torture in that. I would have welcomed any man who came suddenly into my cell, and announced that then and there I must walk out to die; it was the knowledge that I must wait—must hear the clock in a distant church tower lopping off my life by inches, even in the still watches of the night; that was the terror of it. In mercy they might have stopped that clock—might have tried to cheat me a little as to the progress of the days; but that was all a part of my punishment.

And now I come to a strange thing that happened to me in that place of torture—a strange thing, sent for my comfort. You are to understand that two men watched me night and day, and their watches were relieved at regular intervals. I, who had so little to occupy my attention, came to watch for the changes, and for the new faces that greeted me when the time for changes came round. The men were good fellows,

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despite their occupation; I put it on record here that they were considerate and even courteous to me; I read a deep pity for me and my fate in the eyes of more than one of them.

It had come to that night when there were but three days left. I had eaten my meal, and had got into my bed; I liked that time best, because of the stillness, and because I liked to feel, poor doomed mortal that I was, that all the great city slept quietly about me, with every man and woman in it each with their separate trouble and their separate grief. I lay a thing apart, condemned to die; and there was in my mind the curious feeling then that it was strange that the needs of the world were such that a fellow-man had been able to say that I should die, and that other fellow-men were appointed to watch me that I did not escape, and that yet another fellow-man had the dreadful task of killing me, just as I had killed Gavin Hockley. Lying on my bed in my cell I thought of all that, and watched the men who were seated silently near me. And then I fell asleep, quite peacefully; and in that sleep I dreamed a dream.

The end wall of my cell was down, and it seemed as though I looked out beyond it over green fields, on to a place I knew. It was just as though one sat in some strange theatre, and saw through where the wall had gone to some scene beyond. At either side of the stage of that theatre, as it were, sat the motionless warders; the auditorium was my cell. And then I thought that I got up from my bed, and passed straight between them, and out to the freedom of the woods and the fields; leaving them motionless, and even looking behind for a moment, and seeing the empty bed there in which I had so recently lain.

I think I knew then, unconsciously, that I must go back to that cell, and that the vision would fade; I

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am certain that I thought that. But for the moment I was free; I had passed into some strange country, and yet a country I knew. Then, just as in the fairy tales, I seemed to turn a corner, and found myself suddenly in the wood in which I had met Barbara. And it was the most natural thing in the world that she should come towards me out of the wood, smiling, as I had seen her smile before.

It was only when I reached her, and held her hands, and looked into her eyes, that I realized in my dream that she knew what had happened; there were tears in the dear eyes I loved.

"You are sorry for me?" I said, holding her hands. We seemed to be quite alone in the wood, and the sun was shining, just as it had shone on that day I met her first.

"I don't know what to say to you," she replied. "Of course I understand everything about it, and why you did it; I need not ask you about that. It was done for my sake—but oh, the pity of it!"

I remember telling her in my dream that I was quite happy and quite satisfied; I remember impressing upon her that I was not afraid. And then it seemed that we talked of other things, quite as though this death that menaced me had been brushed aside, and could not happen. And when the time came that we seemed to know with certainty that my freedom was done, she put her hands on my shoulders, and looked in my eyes, and spoke words that I remembered distinctly when I woke.

"I want you to understand that I am travelling night and day, and alone, to come to you, Charlie. I have been with my husband in a strange place abroad, where I have heard no news; the dreadful news of you only reached me an hour ago. I am stopping for nothing; my eyes see only one thing—the prison where

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you lie. I will reach you—God willing—before they kill you."

She kissed my lips; and with the kissing I woke, and looked about me. The warders still sat grim and motionless; one of them, as I stirred, turned and asked if I wanted anything. I thanked him, and said I wanted nothing; and I closed my eyes, and tried again to sleep. But sleep would not come to me, and I thought only of Barbara in the wood, and of what she had said—

"I will reach you—God willing—before they kill you!"

If she came now she must undo all that I had given my life to do; she must spoil my sacrifice. If she reached me before I died, I must begin the fight again, strenuously denying what I knew she would say. I began to tremble at the thought of that; almost I made up my mind that if she reached England in time I would not see her. And yet I repented of that; because I knew that if I refused to see her, she would tell her story to those most interested, and I should be powerless to stop her. I spent the rest of that long night lying awake there, staring at the ceiling of my cell, and wondering what I should do.

With the coming of the day I began to realize that I did not know how near she might be in that race with Death. At any moment she might be here, within my prison; and I might find myself face to face with her and her pleading. For I knew that if once I looked into her eyes, and held her hands, it was all up with me; I must speak the truth. More than that, in the dream I had had of her she had declared that she knew the truth already.

The night of that day came, and once again I found myself in my cell, gradually falling to sleep. And once again the end wall disappeared, and I passed out

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between the warders into the wood wherein I had met her. The vision was exactly the same as on the previous night; only now it seemed to me that she looked at me more anxiously, and that there was a strange wistfulness in her voice when she said the words: "I will reach you—God willing—before they kill you!"

Strangely enough, I had no thought of stopping her in my dream; I seemed only anxious to look into her eyes, and to hold her hands, and to snatch from that dear contact what comfort I could for the time yet left me on earth. Exactly as on the previous occasion the dream faded again; and I was in my cell, with the patient warders watching, and with the faint murmur of the waking city outside. And now I began to wonder if after all the dream had only been born of my own thoughts and desires—began to hope, even with a sense of disappointment, that perhaps after all she was far away with her young husband, and would only know of my fate long afterwards.

The next night the same thing happened; save that on this occasion I wandered the wood forlornly enough, and could not find her. I remember that I seemed to walk about the sunlit place, calling her name, and hearing nothing; that I thought more than once that I saw her disappearing in the distance, and ran on, crying to her, and finding no one. When I awoke, for the first time since my sentence I found my pillow wet with tears.

One more day and night of life. And now I began violently to long for her; to feel the bitter injustice of dying here in this place without seeing her. With one moment I would pray earnestly that she might not arrive in time; in the next would be faint with longing to hold her hands and hear her voice. It is safe to say that I never lost sight of that girlish figure; I thought of nothing else. The voice of the good

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chaplain went by me like a thing unheard; if I listened at all, it was to hear him saying over and over again: "Barbara!"—"Barbara!"—"Barbara!"—over and over again as in a sort of chant.

It was growing late in the afternoon, and I was seated on the side of my bed, with my face buried in my hands, thinking. Even then I did not think of the near approach of death; I only longed insanely, now that my hour was coming, to live a little longer, that I might see her. I must have fallen into a sort of stupor; for I know it seemed to me the prison wall was down again, and that once again I had stepped out into the blessed sunlight of the free woods; when I felt a hand laid on my shoulder, and, looking up, saw one of the officials. He said something to me that I did not understand, and I got dazedly to my feet; looking past him, I saw Barbara, with her hands stretched out to me. And she was all in black.

At first I remember that I laughed, and looked stupidly from one to the other of the men about me. Then, at a sign from the man who had spoken, they fell back, and went to the further end of the cell. And I was quite suddenly in her arms.

The beautiful thing about it all was that she was so brave and so strong—braver and stronger than I was. I remember that she comforted me as she might have comforted a child—called me, again and again, her dear, dear boy; whispered again and again that they should not kill me. I was content just to hold her, and to listen to her voice; I thought of nothing else, save of the hopelessness of it all; for I felt that I was wiser than she was, and that I knew the thing to be inevitable. I don't know what power she had exercised, or in what strenuous fashion she had set to work to gain this last interview with me; I only remember with gratitude that they left us alone, and that we sat

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side by side on the low bed, and talked in whispers. We were both so young that perhaps they relaxed the rules a little, and felt that it did not matter.

"I was far away—abroad—and I had no news," she began.

"Yes, I know," I replied. "And you travelled night and day since then to reach me."

"How did you know that?" she demanded quickly. And then I told her of the dreams I had had, and how I had met her in the wood, and how I had known from her own lips that she was coming to me.

She looked at me strangely, passing one hand over her forehead, as though by that mechanical action to clear her mind. "That is very wonderful, Charlie," she said, when I had told her the words she had used. "I said to myself, over and over again, while the slow trains crawled across the countries, and the slow ship ploughed across the sea—I said again and again those words to myself: 'I will reach you—God willing—before they kill you!' That is very wonderful."

"Nothing is wonderful with us," I replied, with a quick laugh that made the men turn and look at me curiously.

"When I heard what had happened, I scarcely knew at first what to do; and then I knew that I must come back—that I must see you, even if everything else proved hopeless. Lucas would have stopped me; he said it was no affair of mine, and that I must not—should not mix myself up in it. So I got away at night, and came straight to you; it was the least that I could do. Now you are to tell me everything that has happened—everything!"

"You will have heard already, Barbara dear, all that has happened—and why I killed him. It was a quarrel—a matter of money."

She looked at me with a world of understanding in

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her eyes. "That is what you have told every one; it is not what you can tell me," she said. "Think, dear"—she laid her hand on my arm, and her lips were quivering, although she spoke bravely enough—"you are to die to-morrow; by the love there is between us, you must not let me believe that you killed a man for such a thing as that. Unless you would kill my soul for ever."

"I can tell you nothing else," I replied as steadily as I could. "Perhaps I was not, after all, half so good as you in your love for me believed."

"You will at least not lie to me," she pleaded. "Tell me at least one thing: was there no talk about me between you?"

I did not answer, but my eyes must have done that for me; she went on, with a little quick note of triumph in her voice. "Ah—I begin to understand. He slandered me—said something of me that your love would not allow?"

"Barbara," I broke in hoarsely, "whatever has happened has been done by me of my own free will, and I must pay the penalty. As I hope to meet my God, and as I hope I may be understood then, I beg you will ask me nothing more. I pay with my life; don't take my victory from me."

"Then I was right," she exclaimed quickly. "I seemed to know it from the first. He met me in the wood that day, just as your guardian had done; he had met me before at my father's house. I was afraid of him, as I was afraid of no one else; I could read, as only a woman can read, what was stamped all over him. Oh—my dear—my dear"—she had sunk suddenly to her knees in that dreary place beside the bed on which I sat—"he was not worth it!"

"Let one thing be clear between us—and it is a dying man who speaks," I said, holding her face between

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my hands, and looking down into her eyes—"you must be silent. No word of this must ever pass your lips, for your own sake—for the sake of every one. The time is coming when you will remember me only as some one who lived, far back in the years, and who loved and worshipped you; and you will keep what is our secret."

"I can't do that; it would shame me for ever," she whispered. "I *must* speak; I *must* make them understand."

"If you go out of this place, leaving with me a certainty that you will speak, you kill me doubly," I said earnestly. "Think what it means to me; nothing you can do or say now will save me; that is not in our hands. Let me die, believing that I helped you and saved you, and I die a happy man. Go out and spread your story, and tell the truth, and I die shamed in my own sight, leaving you shamed behind me. Because the lie I tried to kill will spring alive again, to be babbled by a hundred tongues."

"But if I do this—if I promise silence—is there nothing I can do—nothing I can say?" she whispered brokenly.

"There is nothing you can do," I replied solemnly. "Think of this: that in the years that are coming it may happen, in God's own good time, that some child you love may stand in need of a friend who will strike as I struck—fight as I fought—for her honour. It may happen, long after I am dead, and forgotten by all but you, that some such an one may spring up, to do again more perfectly what I did—springing from the dead ashes of my past to work out the pitiful story I began. Remember that—and don't stop me in what I try to do."

I did not know then the full meaning of what I said; all that was to come upon me later. I did not then

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understand how strangely prophetic my words were, nor how strangely that prophecy was to be fulfilled. For the moment I had succeeded in my purpose; she promised me solemnly that she would keep silence.

Of our farewell I will not speak; she whispered to me words too sacred to be written here. Then, as it seemed, the prison wall went down, and she faded out into the world; the prison wall came up again, and shut me in. But it shut in a stronger and a better man.

I had no further vision of her; my prison had shut me in permanently, and I dreamed of her no more, save in my waking thoughts. I did not sleep that night; I remember that I lay there quietly, with my hands clasped under my head, looking up at the ceiling, and thinking about her; seeing her going on through the long years to come, living her quiet life, and carrying me always in her secret remembrance. That was good; that was very good. Many a man has died with a less blessed thought than that in his mind at the end.

But I was not to die in that sense, after all. Quite early in the morning—that morning on which I had set my mind steadily as the one that meant the end for me—the governor came to my cell, and announced to me that I was reprieved. I was totally unprepared for it; at first I could not understand what he meant. But he told me that on account of my youth the death sentence had been commuted to penal servitude for life.

On account of my youth! I laughed aloud when he said that, because the irony of the thing was so great and so bitter. I was to be shut away for the rest of my natural life—in a living death worse than any I had anticipated. I remember that I prayed him almost wildly to disregard the order—to set it

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aside—to declare that it had arrived too late; and I know that he seemed surprised that I, so young, should long so ardently for death.

So I passed out of the cell from which I had thought to pass only on one last journey, and went away to the place where I was to serve my sentence. And the only thing that troubled me—the only thing about which I thought at all in that new change of events—was what Barbara would think or do when she knew. For myself I did not care; I had died before, at that moment when the wall of the prison had seemed to go down, and Barbara had gone out of my life.

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PART II

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CHAPTER I

MINE ENEMY

SO many steps the length of my cell—beginning with the heel planted against the wall under the high window, and finishing at the door; so many steps across—beginning with the heel planted against the wall opposite the bed, and finishing at night at the bed itself, or in the day, when the bed had been turned up against the wall, at the opposite wall. Beside the door the heavy sheet of ground glass that made another window, outside which a light burned at night for a certain time; before that ground glass a wooden slab, fixed firmly in the wall, for a table; a stool for seat. And on the table my Bible. And that was my home for twenty years!

At first, when I realized what it meant: that I was to live there for all my life—that ambition, hope, and all that made life worthy had been stripped away from me—I rebelled fiercely. If I had had any chance to kill myself I should have done it; because this was so different from anything I had planned. I saw the years stretching on before me—seemed to see the very stones of the place worn by my feet, and I growing old in captivity, with all the busy eager world going on outside. Men and women living and loving, and laughing and weeping; little children being born; the seasons renewing themselves; and I at coarse toil,

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counting the days, and wondering when they would cease for me.

And yet in time, mercifully enough, I did not count the days. I knew when Sunday came round, because there was a difference; one sat in the chapel attached to the prison, and heard a man speak, and the sound of singing and of an organ; one looked about on the faces of other men, prisoners like oneself, and wondered about them. The same faces were seen in the exercise yard and in the shops during the week; but Sunday was a day to be looked forward to, as a break in the dread monotony of the week. I only counted Sundays after a time.

After a time, too, the fierce rebellion passed; I was getting used to things. One gets used to anything, they say, in this world; one's edges become blunted. In the course of years mine were blunted so much that I forgot almost how old I was—ceased to care, in fact. And I remember once that when they shifted me from one cell to another I was resentful, and pleaded to be put back again; I knew the stones of the other, and had grown to like them; and this was new to me. It was like turning a man out of his home, and I was bitter about it.

My fear at first had been that I might lose what refinement I had; I strove passionately to remember what I had been—to be always something better than those with whom I was herded. I believe I was a model prisoner; I read all that I could from the prison library, and I wrote when they would let me. After a time I began to write of that first part of my life—the free part; I was afraid that in the dull course of the years I might forget. Although at first the remembrance of what I had been and what I had done were strongly with me, in time it all narrowed down to the figure of Barbara, and rested there; nor would my

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recollection turn to anything else. And during all those twenty years, wherein time did not stand still with me, *she* never changed; in my remembrance she was always the bright pretty girl of eighteen years of age whom I had loved so long before. It was as though she had died, and I had remembered what she was at the last. And it is safe to say that she was always with me.

Not that the wall of my prison ever went down, as it had done once when I lay condemned to death; that vision never came to me again. But in the night I dreamed of her—a mad impossible dream—that she waited somewhere near at hand—always young and beautiful, and always loving me—waited until such time as I should, by a miracle, get out into the world again. In the first years of my imprisonment I dreamed that, over and over again; but no other figure out of the past came to me—at least, not after my first remembrance of the world had worn off.

In time, as the years went on, it seemed as though, as I grew older, a sort of mental mist descended over all that life I had led before my trial—so that things were blurred, and I did not see them distinctly. Mercifully, too, I grew to take an interest in the work I did inside the prison walls; to be keen and anxious to do it well, and to do it better than my fellows. The prison life had worn and broken me, and I know that I was prematurely old, and a little feeble and fretful compared with what I should have been. And I was shocked one day when, in the tinsmith's shop, I got a brief vision of myself in a shining sheet of tin; I was old and haggard, and the little hair I had was quite grey. It frightened me; and I know that I lay awake that night, thinking bitterly of the years that had been stolen from me, and trying to remember how old I was.

Then the time came, quite unexpectedly, when I

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was set free. I cannot now write of that time, or think of it, without remembering how frightened I was, or how strange the sensation of freedom seemed to me. I had noticed that something was different—had feared that something was going to happen—because they had not cropped my hair for a little time, and would give me no explanation ; and then at last one morning —one bitter winter morning, when I flogged myself with my arms to keep myself warm—I was sent for to the governor's room.

I had been there once or twice before, because the governor took an interest in me, and had tried to get me to talk. I would never do that, and I fear that he had thought that I was sullen or morose. He had asked me about my life before I had come to prison ; had tried even to consult my wishes as to what work I should do ; he had been uniformly kind and considerate. Now, as I went along to his room, I wondered petulantly what new thing this was that he wished to say to me. I did not like the room ; it was a dreadful place to me, hung about with brightly polished steel chains and fetters, and with only a little table in the middle, at which he sat while any poor prisoner talked to him. I was left alone with him there, and he looked at me for a moment or two in silence. He had been a soldier, I think ; he was a fine-looking old fellow, with a trim moustache and deep-set grey eyes.

"I have some news for you," he said in his abrupt fashion, "and I want you to prepare yourself for it. You are not strong, and I do not want to give you a shock of any sort."

I thanked him, and wondered dully what he meant.

"If you could have at the present moment anything for which you liked to ask, what would you choose ?" he asked me.

I shook my head stupidly, and said that I did not

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know; corrected myself in a moment, and asked, wistfully enough and almost with tears in my eyes, that I might have the making of some particular sort of pan in the tinsmith's shop; I had fancied it greatly, but they had given it to another man. He seemed touched by that, and laughed and shook his head; I had never heard him laugh before.

"An order has come to me from the Home Office in regard to you," he said. "Can you guess what it is?" —I shook my head; I did not understand that anything could happen to me.—"An order for your release."

I did not understand, and I suppose I stood staring at him as stupidly as before. For I had been condemned for life; what could this mean now? More than that, I had become settled in the place, and the idea that I should never leave it had sunk gradually into my mind, and had nailed me, as it were, to that spot, so that it would be difficult to tear me from it. I murmured that I did not understand.

"I have sent reports concerning you again and again to the Home Office," went on the governor; "I have been able to point out that you have been an exemplary prisoner; I have urged that fact upon them again and again. Do you know, Avaline, how long you've been here?"

I shook my head; I think I sighed a little. "I think I've forgotten, sir," I said. "So many winters —so many times when the sun shone, and I knew the summer had come again—but I have lost count of the years."

"You were here before my time," he said; and then added in what seemed to be a hushed voice: "You have been here for twenty years."

I said again that I had not kept count; I think I added a little wearily that it did not matter. His kindly voice went on—

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"You were a boy when you came—twenty years of age. You must be forty now—still a young man. You have many years before you—years of freedom, in which you may live a new life." He spoke kindly and encouragingly, but the glance he gave me showed me that he knew I was an old and broken man, despite my years.

"It is too late for me to begin anything, sir," I said. "What life I had lies back behind the twenty years; I cannot take up any broken threads of it now. I did not expect ever to have to take up any free life again." I was moving towards the door, beyond which the warder awaited me, when I came back to him, on a sudden impulse that I would plead with him. "If I might stay here—and go on with what work I have learnt to do—I should be happier," I said. "If I wish to stay, you will not turn me out? God help me—this is my home."

He got up hurriedly from the table, and turned away for a moment, and cleared his throat. "It doesn't rest with me," he said abruptly at last; "I, like you, can only obey orders. Clothes will be provided for you, and a sum of money given you which you have earned; also you will get an order on the railway company which will take you to London. And I hope you'll do well."

I went to the door, turning back for a moment to thank him for what he had done, and to assure him again, something to his bewilderment, that I would have been glad to stop. For I was afraid of the great world outside, and I was too old and broken to begin again. I remember that I thought, bitterly enough, as I had thought before, that it would have been so much better if they had killed me at the first.

It was a wintry morning when I stepped out through the great gates of the prison—a free man. They had

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all been very kind to me; most of the warders whom I knew well had shaken hands with me, and had given me little common keepsakes by which to remember them; I had been infinitely touched by the fact that one and all spoke to me as "Sir." I went with reluctant feet; strange as it may seem, I looked back more than once hungrily as I went out through the prison yard that I was to see no more, and through the great courtyard. A little wicket in the gate opened, and I shook hands with the man in charge there; and so left them all behind. Before me stretched a long road downwards towards a town in the far distance; I saw smoke rising lazily from its chimneys in the early morning air; all around me lay the great wastes of snow. And I alone, as it seemed, in the world—to begin again.

They had provided me with clothing that was new and rough, and awkward and ill-fitting; I felt like the naked impossible thing I was, that had been clothed and covered up in a hurry, so that men should not recognize me. I had a little money in my pockets, and a few odd things that had once belonged to me and had been carefully kept—things that had been mine twenty years before, and were mine again now.

I sat down on a heap of stones near the gates of the prison, with my mind full of the bitter injustice of the thing. If I had been in my cell now, I should have been eating my poor breakfast—comfortably! I should have known what the day held for me. And here I was—an outcast, and tired already before the day was begun.

The mere fact of wearing civilized clothing again, however coarse and common it might be, had brought back to my remembrance something of what I had been—some faint ghostly shadow of it. I found myself looking at my coarse hands, and at the broken stunted nails, and striving to remember what those hands had

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been like ever so many years ago when I was a boy. Then, as a shadow fell across me, I realized that I had been sitting musing for some time; and looked up from the hands, to see a man standing in front of me.

He was a tall man, very thin, and not at all well dressed. He had a long thin nose with wide nostrils, and a short beard that was black at the roots and grey elsewhere. He stood with his hands clasped before him, and with the cold white fingers turning incessantly over each other. I wondered in a dull fashion where he had come from; but as he did not greatly interest me, I went on again looking at my hands. Then he spoke my name.

"Charles Avaline," he said, in a curious jerky voice that was only raised a little above a whisper.

I looked up at him, as I might have looked up any time during those twenty years at a warder, and spoke my number. It had been the natural thing to do with every one. "No. 145," I said, in a dull voice.

The man laughed in a disagreeable fashion as I dropped my eyes again from his face. "Poor broken devil!" he muttered to himself, and then spoke my name again. "Avaline—Charles Avaline. I don't want your number."

"They never wanted my name in there," I said, jerking my head towards the great gates of the prison. "It was always 145. But I'm Charles Avaline," I added.

He dropped his hand on my shoulder, and shook me —pulled me to my feet, in fact. "What are you sitting here for?" he demanded. "Don't you know you're free? Aren't you glad to be free?"

"What's the use?" I asked, with a shake of the head. "Don't you know I'm dead—dead to everybody? I've been in there"—I nodded at the prison

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with a queer sort of pride at the thought—"I've been in there twenty years."

"And might have been there another twenty, or another forty, or more than that, if you'd lived so long," he retorted. "They seem to have driven the brains out of you—what few you ever had. Look at me; have you ever seen me before?"

He struck himself on the breast, and leaned forward to stare at me. I trembled a little before him, but contrived to shake my head. "I don't remember," I said. But I knew that some old memory was springing up in me; I knew that I had seen some such face as this, perhaps in a dream, a long, long while ago. Life and memory were stirring so slowly in me yet that I could remember nothing. I only knew that I existed, and that I stood trembling in the snow before this man, and that I was cold and dimly afraid. I knew no more than that.

"Well, I've waited outside your grave for you until you came to life again," he said, with another laugh. "I'm your friend, if you know what that means, and I want to help you. Take off your hat; I want to look at you."

That old habit of obedience was so strong in me still that I pulled off my hat, and stood there, grey-headed, before him in the winter sunlight. Whoever he was he seemed shocked for a moment beyond measure; fell back from me a pace or two with a dropping jaw.

"God!" he muttered; and then in an awe-struck voice I heard him say again: "Poor broken devil!"

I put on my hat again, and waited patiently to hear what more he would say; I felt instinctively that in all the great world in which I stood so forlorn and lonely this man might chance to be my friend. And I wanted friends then badly.

"What are you going to do, Avaline?" he asked.

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I shook my head. "I don't know," I said, with a glance down the long road that sloped away to the distant town where the smoke was rising in the still morning air. "I'm afraid to think."

"Got any money?" he demanded; and I turned out my pockets, and counted into his hands all I had. I told him a little proudly that it was what I had earned behind the great gates that frowned upon us as we talked.

"All this in twenty years!" He laughed, and transferred the few coins of which I had been so proud to his own pocket. "I'm your friend, Avaline," he said. "Come with me, and I'll look after you."

I want you to understand, if you can, something of what my feelings were at that time. I had gone into that place fiercely rebelling against my fate; I had gone into it young, with the fierce hot blood of life beating in my veins. Twenty years of it had tamed me and broken me; it had been a gradual process, but a sure one nevertheless. Slowly the rot of the prison had eaten into my soul; slowly and surely I had sunk to be what I was—a thing obedient to orders, and expecting always to have life measured out in scanty regular doses for my daily consumption. Now, in a moment, I had been flung upon the world; small wonder that I turned in fear and trembling to the first creature that called me by name, and spoke a decent word to me that was not a command. I had been tossed out into the world after twenty years; I was fumbling feebly to find my place in it—and this man might be able to tell me. So I went with him down the long hill into the town; and I felt even then that I went with the trot that had been mine in the exercise yard of the prison.

We came down into the pleasant little place; there were buxom women standing at the doors of the little

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houses, and whistling boys in the streets, and children trooping along on their way to school. By that time I had hold of my companion's arm, the better to keep up with his easier stride; I turned with him willingly enough into a little inn in a side street of the town, where, in a quiet room where we were alone, he ordered breakfast. When the smoking food was put before me I laughed, and clapped my hands like a child. He did not eat much himself; but he seemed greatly amused and interested at seeing me eat, and seemed, too, to understand what I felt.

"That puts life into you, doesn't it?" he asked, peering at me across the table. "That makes you young again, and ready to face the world—eh?"

I nodded gratefully, although I knew that it was my money that had paid for the meal. When I had eaten all I could, he leaned across the table towards me, and looked at me closely. I smiled at him in a friendly way, because I felt that he had been good to me.

"Charles Avaline—how old are you?"

I thought for a moment, and remembered what the governor had said to me before I left the prison. "I was a mere boy of twenty when I went in there," I said, "and I have lived there for twenty years."

"A simple sum in arithmetic," said my companion, with a grim laugh. "There's a looking-glass over the fireplace," he added, pointing to it; "look at it, and see what has happened to you in twenty years, my man of forty!"

I laughed as though this were some great game he was playing; I got up and went to the looking-glass. Staring into it I saw a worn lined face, with the eyes of a tired old man set in it, and crowned with grey hair. I had not seen myself in a mirror for all those years; I looked into the startled old face of a man of sixty at least. Realizing for the first time a little who I was,

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and what I was—and understanding perhaps the tragedy of what I had been—I turned away, sick at heart and afraid, and looked at him. He was still seated there, with his elbows on the table, and with that grim smile hovering about his lips.

"You're an old, old man," he sneered, "of no use to any one in the world, and of no use to yourself. Your life is a thing of the past, and you can't begin again now. What are you going to do—how will you live?"

I told him that I did not know; he seemed so much stronger than I was, and so much more accustomed to the big world in which I was expected to move, that I begged him to help me if he would, and to show me what I should do. I was so much a child, after that long burial to which I had been subjected, that I could not think for myself; indeed it never occurred to me to ask how this man came to know my name, or why he had met me at the prison gates.

"I mean to look after you," he assured me. "You shall live again, Charles Avaline; you shall take up your life where you thought once you had laid it down. You have been snatched from death; you shall come out into the world with me again; you shall come into your kingdom!"

I went with him placidly enough when presently we left the inn, and set off through the town. If you wonder that I should have submitted myself so readily to him, I ask you to remember the life I had lived, and the fear in which I stood of this great world that was closing about me. I was to have the past brought back to me fully and strongly, but I did not know that then; I was to live again, in another way, the life I once had lived, and to understand it in a new fashion.

We came to a railway station, and my companion took a ticket for London; he seemed to understand

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that I had my pass from the prison—in fact, he asked me for it. The station master at the little place looked at me queerly, but I think he was used to poor prisoners who came to him with Government slips of paper to take them to various parts of the kingdom. He shut us into a third-class carriage alone together, and we started for London. And on the way, strangely enough, my companion raked over that long buried past of mine, and reminded me who I was, and what I was. I remember that I cowered before him, as I might have cowered before a judge who knew my record, and was passing sentence upon me.

"Charles Avaline, twenty years ago you killed a man," he began.

I nodded my head; I remembered that, at least. Had I not struck the man down many and many a time since, and seen him lying at my feet. But in the long dreary course of the years I had forgotten what it was for, or why it had been done; I only knew that he had deserved to die, and that I had done well to kill him.

"The gallows was built for you, Charles Avaline; the hangman stood ready for you; the grave yawned for you. But you were reserved for something else, Charlie; there was still some work for you to do in the world."

I leaned forward on my seat, and stared at him; for there was a dim feeling in my mind that I had met him somewhere, and that I knew him. The mention of my name in that form—"Charlie"—seemed to wake within me some old memory that had been dead. His knowledge of my crime, and of how I had gone down so near to death, set me wondering what manner of man this was that had seized me at the very prison gates, and now held me in his power by his knowledge of me.

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"Who are you?" I demanded, staring at him fearfully. "What is your name?"

"You shall know soon enough," he replied, and relapsed into silence. I sat in a corner of the carriage, staring at him, and wondering about him; striving to fit him in with some dream I had had—a dream that had begun in some old time before the prison closed upon me. But the habit of thought had long been lost to me; my brain was a poor mechanical dull thing, long rusty for want of exercise. In fact, I do not think that I should have recognized him at all, if I had not noticed again that curious action of his thin white fingers, twining over each other restlessly. I had the courage to lean forward and pluck off his hat, and stare into his face. I think I must have shrieked out his name.

"Fanshawe! Jervis Fanshawe!"

"Yes, Jervis Fanshawe," he said. "Who else do you think would be likely to inquire about you, or to find out what day you were coming out? Who else do you think would watch and wait for twenty years to get hold of the man again who ought to have died twenty years ago. There's blood upon you, Charlie Avaline, and not all your years of servitude can wipe it away; but I think I'll stick to you." He folded his arms, and grinned and nodded at me, as though indeed he owned me body and soul.

And now the first frail door that held in check the floods of memory was down, and I began to read the past. Nothing was sure yet, nothing that I clearly understood; for at first, like a man who, getting old, thinks in a circle, and so sees his childhood first and most clearly, I saw my own boyhood, that had had nothing in common with this man. But gradually I began to fumble my way blindly to the point at which he touched my life. And gradually my old horror of him swept over me, and taught me instinctively that he

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was something to be feared and to be avoided. Without knowing what I did, I sprang up, and made a leap for the opposite door of the carriage, with the blind determination to get out of the moving train. But before I had got the door open he had wound his long arms about me, and had pulled me back on to the seat.

"Not that way!" he cried, as I feebly struggled with him. "Death is not for you—yet. Don't you understand that you belong to me; when your time comes I'll settle what manner of death you'll die. What have you to be afraid of? We're in the same boat, you and I; the world has kicked us both pretty hard; we may do better together than we have done apart. Don't be ungrateful; your loving guardian has come back to you after twenty years; we'll see life together, Charlie."

I shrank away from him, and put up my arm as though to ward off a blow. "Where are you taking me?" I asked in a whisper.

"To London—and back into the world," he said, seizing my upraised arm, and dragging it down, and shaking me playfully. "There's work for you to do in the world, Charlie—great work."

"Where are you taking me?" I asked again, shuddering, and hiding my face in my hands.

"Before your hair was grey, poor fool, and while the world smiled upon you, you lived and loved and laughed. You shall live and love and laugh again; you shall forget your prison and the fear of death that has been upon you; you shall live again."

"Who can do all this for me?" I asked.

He tapped himself on the breast. "I can—and I will," he said. "There was a woman you loved in those old days—have you forgotten her name?"

"It was—it was 'Barbara!'" I whispered.

"Barbara!" he repeated, and I did not notice the

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sneer that was in his tones. "Barbara it was, and Barbara you shall see again. She shall rise up in the flesh before you, and show you what love is—and perhaps something else beside!"

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CHAPTER II

GHOSTS

LONDON terrified me after the long silence of the prison; I was afraid of it. More than that, I discovered that I had forgotten my brief experience of it; so that I should have been unable, even had it been necessary, to find my way to the old rooms in the little street off Holborn, wherein I had dreamed my brief dreams, and wherein the Law had so suddenly gripped me, and swept me out of the world twenty years before. But I had this man for guide—this man who had been my guardian, and was now, as it seemed, my friend; I could only cling to him, with some measure of gratitude in my heart that he should have remembered me at all, and have come to my rescue when I was once more flung upon the world.

I gathered that he was poor; there were no signs about him of that prosperity that had once been his. Moreover, on reaching London he hurried me into an omnibus, and took me a long way rattling through an obscure part of the town to a street of mean houses abutting on the river; it was a place of houses evidently let out in rooms. He rang a bell at one house, and after a long time the sound of shuffling feet was heard, and the door opened a little way, and a face looked out. I was not sure at first whether it was the face of a child or of an old and wizened woman. Then, as the door was opened a little wider, I saw that it was a shabby

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and forlorn-looking girl of about fifteen or sixteen, dressed in an old skirt and blouse much too big for her.

"All right, Moggs," said Fanshawe, "you needn't be afraid to let us in." He thrust her aside as he spoke, and motioned to me with a jerk of the head to follow him. I went in, and the girl closed the door.

"There's a letter for you upstairs, guv'nor," she said, calling after Fanshawe, who was mounting the stairs.

He muttered something, and went on his way; I followed obediently. We came into a forlorn-looking room, with an untidy bed in one corner, and with some wretched scraps of furniture scattered about it; a ragged apology for a carpet covered about half the floor. A cupboard, with a broken hinge to its door, swung open in one corner, and disclosed a few plates and cups and saucers, and some glasses that did not match. The place was destitute of fire, and was bitterly cold. Jervis Fanshawe strode out of the room again, and screamed querulously for the girl. "Moggs! Moggs!"

She came up in a moment or two; listened calmly to his volcanic outburst at her; and proceeded to light the fire. She was the strangest little person I ever remember to have seen; she went on calmly with her work, singing to herself under her breath a sort of melancholy dirge that had no tune nor time about it, but which seemed in some vague way to comfort her, much as a man may suck at an empty pipe, or a baby at a bottle. She took not the faintest notice of Fanshawe, despite all that he said; she only looked at me curiously once or twice before finally quitting the room. By that time my guardian (as I must continue to call him, for want of a better title) was deep in the letter he had found on the table. Finally he thrust it into his pocket, with an exclamation of annoyance, and turned to me.

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I suppose the fact of seeing me standing there, huddled as close as I could to the fire, reminded him of something in the past; he looked round the room, and waved his hands, and spoke mockingly.

"Welcome, Charlie Avaline, to my rooms!" he exclaimed. "Perhaps I should say 'room,' because there's only one of 'em. Observe the furniture, the costly appointments, the ease and luxury of it all! To this have we come, Charlie—you and I. Who can say that we haven't done well for ourselves?"

He was on his knees before the fire, stirring it savagely and striving to make it burn, and muttering about it. He looked up at me with that old look of contempt on his face; flung the rusty poker into the grate with a clatter, and got to his feet. He was in a strange mood, and I did not know what to make of him. More than that, I was coming back so slowly to life myself that I did not trouble very much about him; I had just those animal instincts to warm myself, and to get food, and to rest, and nothing more. Whatever old pulses he had stirred in me with his mention of the woman I had loved were dropping back into their old condition. The time was coming when they were to be stirred and shaken, and brought to full and abundant life; but his was not the hand to sweep the strings of my being, and wake any music within me. I had only a dull curiosity concerning him, and that curiosity he presently began to satisfy.

"You're such a bloodless thing—something that has borne a number for years—a slave; one doesn't know how much you understand, or how much you don't," he began, looking at me over his shoulder in that old fashion I dimly remembered.

"I'll try to understand," I replied patiently.

"It is necessary that you should be told certain things; there's work for you to do, and you must

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remember who you are, and what you have been, before you can undertake it. I've waited a long time for you, on the chance that you might come into my hands again; and I'm getting an old man, and time is precious. Carry your dull mind back, and see if you remember what *I* was."

I suppose I looked at him in a troubled way, as one not clearly understanding; he beat his fist upon the table, and cried out harshly at me.

"Numbskull! Do you remember what position I occupied?"

"You had money—you lived well—you had many friends," I began slowly; and he interrupted me impatiently.

"Yes, I had friends—money—power," he exclaimed. "The world went well with me, and there were those who trembled at the sound of my voice. Indirectly *you* brought me to this," he added, waving his hand to indicate the poor room. "When you killed Gavin Hockley, you let loose a cloud of things that had better have been hidden; I had forgotten the possibility of that when I set you on to kill him."

"I killed him because he spoke ill of a woman," I said, like one repeating a lesson.

"You killed him because I had made up my mind that you should," he retorted. "However, that's neither here nor there. Hockley had left behind a cloud of debts; he had paper signed by me; he had letters of mine. Even in those first days, when you were in prison, the thing sprang up alive to confront me; men whispered those ugly words, forgery and fraud. You've not been the only prisoner, my fine fellow."

"You?" I stared at him in amazement.

He laughed disagreeably. "Yes, they shut me away for seven years; and I came out what you see me now—

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a man ruined and broken, without a friend in the world, and without any one to speak a good word for me. Those I had known were dead, or would not speak to me; I was too old to make new friends of the sort I had known before. So I've lived by my wits, Charles Avaline, just as you'll have to live. While you've been warm and well-cared for at the expense of your country, I've been down into the depths, and have seen strange things. And it's not a nice world for a man under those circumstances. One longs to get hold of another man, and to drag that other man down, and show him that bitter life too," he added savagely.

"I—I'm sorry," I said vaguely; I did not know what else to say. "You see, I have not known what has been happening. In all the long time (they tell me it was twenty years)—in all the long time that I have been there I have not seen the face of any one I ever knew before; and I have not heard a voice that was a voice out of the past, save in dreams. And I never had a letter."

"No—they forget you easily when you go under," said Fanshawe. "As for me, I thought they'd hang you; and by the time they hadn't done that I was too full of my own troubles. I suppose you'd like to know something about the old people and the old days—eh?" He thrust his face towards me across the table; his eyes were hungry. I did not understand then what was in the mind of the man; his brain was clear and strong, and his plans already well thought out. My brain was dull and tired, and I had no plans at all.

"You remember Hammerstone Market?" he went on, watching me, and perhaps noting the expression of my face as I heard names I remembered. "All changed down there, in one way, and yet not changed in another. Some dead, and some alive. You remember Barbara?"

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"Yes; I loved—loved Barbara," I whispered brokenly.

"You shall see her again; talk with her again; come into her life again." There was a fierce eagerness about him that held me and frightened me. "That's what I'm going to do for you; that's what I meant when I said that I would bring you back to love and life and laughter. Look round this room—and then see it all swept away," he went on with growing excitement. "I've found one friend who will help us both; it may happen that we are not poor and forlorn any more. We have both suffered; it is right that we should have some little joy in our lives."

"What are you going to do with me?" I asked him, as I had asked before; but he laughed, and would not answer me.

I spent the rest of the day in that place, cowering over the fire, and striving hard to look back into the past. I found it difficult at first; it was like a closed book to me, in which only here and there, when I was able at last to open it, could I decipher a few words—a few broken sentences that came like the sigh of a dead wind blowing over the dead years back to me. I got up mechanically when I was called to eat what simple food he put before me, going back afterwards to crouch over the fire, and to start that burrowing process again into the lost years.

It was late in the evening when I saw him reading again that letter he had taken from his pocket, and muttering to himself over it. At last he seemed suddenly to make up his mind about it; he crammed it back into his pocket, and put on his hat, and announced that he was going out. "You can stay here," he told me curtly; "no one will interfere with you."

I sat still for a little time after he had gone; and then an intolerable restlessness seized upon me. I was

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like a lost spirit; I did not know what to do with myself. I found myself pacing out again on the floor the steps that for twenty years I had paced out in my cell; and finding the room too large, so that the steps would not fit in. And at last got my hat, and went out into the streets; and looked about me, with a new and definite idea for the first time growing in my mind.

Hammerstone Market! At Hammerstone Market I had been happy once; and there, waiting for me, and preserved in some strange fashion through all the years, was the life I had laid down and left behind me. Why had I not thought of this before? It was the simplest thing in the world; I had but to go to that place where I had been happy to pick up again the thread of my life, and to put together successfully the puzzle I did not now understand. So I set out for the place, with a new and happy confidence growing in my mind.

I was but groping yet, and I did not understand fully what I meant to do. I was but a poor thing, striving hard to get back to some life I had lost; and so it happened that I set about it as a child might have done, and in what seemed to my childish mind the simplest and most direct way.

I have wondered since what I must have looked like to any one who saw me then, wandering about in search of Hammerstone Market. I have a vision of myself as being tall and thin, and gaunt and old-looking; with deep eyes that must have been pathetic in the hopeless weariness that was in their depths. My years counted as nothing; I was a shabby tired old man, going back, pathetically enough, to pick up here and there a thread of the life that had been snatched so suddenly from me. I knew of no way to reach the place of my dreams, except to walk; and I only knew dimly that it lay in a county not very far to the north of London.

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By little short of a miracle I found the place, after walking through the best part of a long winter night. When once I had got out of London the road had proved to be a straight one; I walked on and on with dogged persistency. By the time the morning light was beginning to break over the country that stretched before me, I was within reasonable distance of the place, and my heart was light with a hope it had not known for years. For I was coming back to the place where for a little time at least I had lived and loved and suffered—and I was to see Barbara!

Even then I had no thought that she could be anything but the bright girl I had left. Time had stood still with me, and my life had been so completely a thing of dreams that she was a dream creature in my mind still; I could think of her in no other way. I came back to the place where I had known her after that lapse of twenty years, but under what different conditions! I had come there before a mere boy, with the world at my feet; I crept back now, jaded and weary and old, to look on the life I had known, and to find my lost love, who, had I but thought about the matter clearly and sanely, I must surely have understood might well be in her grave years before.

The place was unchanged; the mere sight of the old houses and of the quaint High Street stirred my memory, and made me see more clearly into that past in which I was groping. I went on eagerly; I wanted to find again all that I had lost so long ago.

Perhaps it was characteristic of my wasted life that it should be winter now, instead of the summer when I had first met Barbara in the woods; it was as though the joy and beauty of it all had been stripped away. But when I came to the wood at last, with the bare branches of the trees standing up nakedly against the sky, a gleam of sun struck across it, making fanciful

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patterns on the snow. I sat down on a fallen tree, and looked about me, with my mind clearing more and more every minute.

Have you ever closed your eyes, and seen suddenly and vividly in a mental picture some scene that was enacted years and years before—seen the figures moving in it, just as they did long ago? That was what I saw then, or began to see, when, suddenly raising my eyes, I saw standing in the sunlight an easel with a canvas upon it. I knew then that in some extraordinary fashion I had dropped back through the years, and had come again as a young man into the wood. Yet not as a young man; because now I was poor and old, and shabby and tired—and it was winter. There could be na getting away from that; in spite of the sunlight it was winter.

I walked up to the canvas, and touched it, to be sure that it was real. And then, knowing my way clearly, as it seemed, I walked on into the depths of the wood, looking about me.

God of mercy!—she was there! I saw her coming straight through the wood—Barbara, with her hands outstretched, and a smile on her face; I knew her in a moment. And going towards her, as it seemed, was myself—a tall straight youth, with an easy step and an eager manner, meeting her and holding her hands, and looking into her eyes. I had slipped behind a tree, so that they did not see me; I stood there with my hands pressed against my throbbing temples, looking on at what seemed to be a dream picture of something that had happened years and years before—looking on at myself, and seeming to live again my own hopeless love story. For now I saw that the boy held her close in his arms, and whispered to her; and she seemed to be weeping.

My first thought was that I must have suddenly gone

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mad, or that this was some dream out of which I should presently wake. But while I stood there staring at them, I went over in my mind all that I had done the previous night and that day: my long walk from London—and the coming into the old town at break of day—then this further journey here. I looked down at my shabby clothes, and stared in bewilderment at my coarsened hands with the broken nails. Yes—I was convict No. 145—once Charlie Avaline; and these were no dream figures, but two people living out again, in some strange fashion, the life that I had lived in a few short hours with Barbara Patton. Yet here was Barbara herself—with the eyes of my Barbara, and the face of my Barbara—all unchanged, as I had dreamed of her so often in my cell in prison! How was I to account for that?

I remained hidden at no great distance from them; I saw them presently part. The boy was impressing something upon her; I saw her dry her tears, and listen, and even strive to smile at something that he said. Then they clung together for a moment or two —and she ran away through the woods, waving her hand to him as she went. He walked back dejectedly to his easel, and packed up his things, and went away. And I, in a fever of anxiety and remorse and wonder, followed him.

Perhaps the strangest thing of all was to see him go to that inn where I had once stayed—going into it with the light step that I must have had twenty years before. It was as though the ghost of myself had come back, in a better shape than I, to take up the life I had dropped.

I watched him all that day; which is to say that I hung about the little town, and waited for him, wondering what he would do. I was not surprised when, as it was growing dark, he came out into the High Street, and set off at a swinging pace in the direction of the

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house I had known as belonging to old Patton. With the trot that had been mine for so long in the exercise ground of the prison, I went after him.

It was obvious that he was not so lucky as I had been, in that he must not enter the house. I crept into the grounds, and presently saw him standing on that very terrace on which I had stood with my Barbara—looking in at the windows and listening; I was below the terrace, crouched among some bushes, watching him, and watching the lighted windows. Presently a man walked to one of them, and opened it a little way, and returned into the room; and still I lay there, watching and thinking and wondering.

Then across the silence of the night there broke the sound of music, and the voice of a girl singing. I dropped my head upon my arms as I lay there; it seemed as though I could not bear it. For this was a song I had heard twenty years before in that very room, and it seemed to me that the voice was the same, coming hauntingly and wonderfully out of the past. The boy stood listening too; every word and every note floated to us clearly. It seemed as though out of the deep night of the years Barbara's voice came to me, singing to me as she had sung before.

The song ceased, and the last notes died away. The girl came to the open window, and looked out into the night; I saw the boy crouching there, watching her. Then from somewhere in the room a man's voice sounded quite clearly and distinctly.

"Barbara, you have your mother's voice."

She turned her head, and looked back into the room. "Thank you, father," she said; "I like to hear you say that."

I lay still, with a full understanding coming to me for the first time. This was not my Barbara; this was her child. I had come back, to find the mother

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gone, and the child in her place—in her very likeness. And I had come back, as it seemed, to touch again a love story as hopeless and as broken as my own had been. While the girl stood at the window, and the boy crouched in the shadows watching her, I lay there —thinking—thinking!

Presently the window was fastened, and the shutters drawn; lights began to appear in the upper windows. The boy lingered for a long time, but presently stole away; I crept after him. I did not know what to do, or what to think; I was like a lost soul wandering the earth, forlorn and hopeless and helpless. But he, going on through the night back to his lodging, was so much a part of myself, sprung up suddenly out of the past, that I could not bear to lose sight of him; I was close behind him when we came to the outskirts of the little town. There he turned suddenly, and faced about, looking at me.

"Why do you follow me?" he asked suspiciously.

"I meant no harm," I replied. "I beg you won't take any notice of me; I'm only a poor wanderer."

I saw his hand go to his pocket, as though he would have given me money; I drew back hastily. "Not that," I said; "I don't need that. But I was once like you—God knows how many years ago!—and so I liked to feel that I was near you. I'm sorry . . . . good-night!"

I went away quickly, leaving him staring after me. Presently, when he had gone on again, I followed him, at a greater distance; came to the inn where he was stopping, and stood outside for a long time, wondering passionately and despairingly if I could help him; and then laughing at that thought, ruefully enough, when I remembered my own forlorn condition.

The hopelessness of doing anything there, where I was merely a penniless waif, was borne in upon me more

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forcefully the next day. I had found shelter in a barn, and I begged my breakfast from a charitable woman at a cottage. Then I set out again to walk to London. It was only when I was many miles on my journey that I stood still in the road, with a hand pressed to my forehead, and with a new light breaking in upon me.

Jervis Fanshawe had tried to tell me of this new Barbara! Why had I forgotten that; why hadn't I understood what he meant? Jervis Fanshawe had told me that I should see my Barbara again, as I had seen her in the past; that I should come back to love and life and laughter. Jervis Fanshawe understood; surely he would be able to show me what was best to be done. I set off at a greater rate than ever for London, determined that I must see him at the earliest opportunity, and tell him the wonderful thing that I had discovered.

I could think only of that discovery; I forgot completely what the man was whose services I desired to enlist—forgot all he had done, and all I had suffered indirectly through him. I had no one in the world to whom I could turn, save this man; and I only remembered with gratitude then that he had come to me at the moment of my release from prison, and had given me food and lodging.

It was very late when I reached the shabby little street in the neighbourhood of the river; I must have found it by a sort of instinct, for I did not even know its name. I came to the house, and rang the bell; the child my guardian had called Moggs opened the door. She grinned when she saw me, and jerked her head towards the staircase.

"Lucky you've come," she said, in a sort of hoarse whisper. "'E's bin carryin' on like mad, blamin' me for it, of all fings. I made sure you'd cut yer lucky."

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I guessed dimly that my guardian had wondered at my absence; I went quickly up the stairs. I opened the door, and went eagerly into the room, with my tale at my very lips; but I stopped short when I saw that another man was seated at the table from which Fanshawe had risen.

"So you've come back, have you?" sneered my guardian, looking me over with no very favourable eye. "And by the look of you, I should think you've been out of doors a little."

I became suddenly aware how deplorably muddy and dirty I was. Like a scolded child, I pulled off my hat, and stood there with bowed head, unable to say a word. I raised my head when I heard the other man speak to Fanshawe.

"Is this the fellow?"

It was a curiously hard voice, a cold metallic voice. I looked at the speaker, and saw a man a little over thirty years of age, with a strong, rather heavy face; I noticed that his dark hair grew low on his forehead, and rather forward at the temples. He was very well-dressed—so well-dressed, in fact, that his being in that place at all on friendly terms with the shabby Jervis Fanshawe seemed incongruous in itself.

"Yes, this is the fellow," said Fanshawe, taking me by the sleeve and drawing me forward. "You can speak to him yourself."

The man lounging at the table looked up at me contemptuously enough—studied me as he might have studied a dog he meant to buy if he approved of it. "You've been in prison?" he said at last.

I bowed my head, and dropped my eyes. "A long time," I replied.

"And now are thrown on the world, with a living to get if possible, and with no trade at your fingers' ends—eh? Well, I may be able to help you. We are

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friends here, and so I can speak freely. You killed a man ? "

" A long time ago," I said, without raising my eyes.

" There's nothing to be ashamed of," he retorted, with a disagreeable laugh—" in fact, you're a man to know. I've been talking to Fanshawe here about you, and I think you may serve my purpose."

" In a word, Charlie," broke in Fanshawe excitedly, " there's a chance for you to get back a little payment for what you have suffered—to pay off old scores—to get a little cheap revenge. Don't stare at me like that ; pull your wits together, and listen."

" To pay off old scores ? Revenge ? " I stared at him, wondering if he knew what I had seen in that old place of my dreams—wondering what he would say next.

" You have served a long term of imprisonment—your life has been broken and spoilt and ruined," went on the man at the table, setting my guardian aside. " Naturally you hate those who have drawn you into that ; naturally your mind is filled with the desire to get even with them—to settle that old account."

" I don't understand," I murmured, looking from one to the other.

Jervis Fanshawe seized my arm, and shook me fiercely. " Years ago you suffered, like a fool, for the sake of a woman ; she cared nothing for you, and married another man. Do you remember that ? "

" Yes. Her name was Barbara," I replied slowly.

Fanshawe turned to the stranger. " You see he remembers something," he said. Then he turned again impatiently to me. " I have already told you that a new Barbara has sprung up in her place—a child—a girl."

Glancing at the face of the stranger at the table, I decided to hide my knowledge of what I had seen ; I

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said nothing. Perhaps here I was to be shown the way to do what was in my mind; perhaps I was to be helped, as I had never expected to be helped at all.

"You understand, Avaline," went on the stranger, in his deadly voice, "that I take an interest in this new Barbara, who is like the Barbara you so mistakenly loved twenty years ago. In other words, for her own sake it is necessary that I should see much of her—communicate with her often. That is difficult without a third person, because the lady herself is a little obdurate. Do you follow me?"

"Yes," I replied, looking at him for a moment, and then turning to my guardian. "I begin to understand."

"So that if I can introduce to her some one she does not know—some one who is bound, by reasons of policy, to do what he is told, without thought of the consequences—I am a gainer," went on the man at the table. "You have reason to hate a girl, so unfortunately formed in the image of the woman who deceived you, and brought disaster upon you; you have reason to be loyal to me, because I can keep you from starving, and can give you clothes and shelter. You're a poor broken worn-out thing, and I take pity on you. Now do you understand the situation?"

I understood it so well that my mind, for the first time since I had stepped out from the prison gates, was clear, and I was fully alive. I looked eagerly from one to the other; I told the man brokenly that I would do all he asked; I think I suggested that I would be his slave. He might tell me to do anything; I was eager to take up that old story that I had been compelled to lay down.

"For your revenge?" he asked, with a grin.

"For my revenge!" I said; and burst into a shout of laughter.

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"Don't take any notice of him," I heard my guardian whisper. "The poor fool is only half-witted; his years of prison life have told upon him. But he's the man you want!"

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CHAPTER III

I ENTER UPON SERVITUDE

WHILE I stood in the room watching the two men, and eager to know what work was to be given me to do that would enable me to touch again the life I had left, Fanshawe and the stranger discussed me in low voices, as they might have discussed some piece of furniture they contemplated putting in some particular place. I caught one or two of their remarks; I listened with the humility that years had bred in me to what they said of me.

"You can kick or bully him into anything," I heard Fanshawe say, as he looked over his shoulder at me contemptuously. "For the sake of his bread and butter he'll do what he's told, and he'll do it humbly. If any feeling of revenge is left in him, it will act as a spur; but I don't think the spur will be needed. If he gets troublesome, you can always kick him into the road; he'll crawl back to you, and lick your hand, like the shabby dog he is."

"We must give him a name," said the stranger, looking at me with a thoughtful frown. "We can't send him among those people with his old label attached to him."

"No—no—you won't do that," I pleaded; for the thought of that had not occurred to me before. "Give me any name you like."

"Oh, we won't shame you, Mr. Charles Avaline,"

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sneered Fanshawe; "you needn't be afraid of that. What name would you like?"

"What were you in prison—I mean, what work did you do?" demanded the other suddenly.

"I worked in the tinsmith's shop for the most part," I said. "They told me I made a good workman; they showed my work to visitors sometimes; and then they would call my number—145 was my number—and point me out, and whisper."

"That will do as well as anything else," said the other man, who was evidently paying no attention to my remarks. "We'll christen you 'Tinman'; that shall be your name from this time forward. See that you answer to it." He got up and sauntered to the door, with a careless nod to Jervis Fanshawe; stopped there, and turned round, slapping the side of his leg with a light cane he carried. I remember that he reminded me in a strange haunting fashion of another man I had seen, who had stood with his arms akimbo, and with a light cane resting on one hip and under his hand.

"And by the way, Tinman, you'd better know your new master's name. I am Murray Olivant; keep that name in your mind, because you'll have to remember it. Fanshawe will tell you what to do, and when I want you."

He sauntered out of the room, banging the door behind him. Jervis Fanshawe turned to me, rubbing his lean hands together, and grinning delightedly.

"Now, Charlie, perhaps you'll know in future who your best friend is," he said. "This is only the beginning; it all rests in your hands to make the most of this opportunity, for both our sakes. Olivant's rich—very rich indeed; it'll go hard with us if we don't dip our fingers into his pockets more deeply than he suspects. Jail-birds both, Charlie," he added,

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tapping me on the breast with his lean forefinger; "it won't do for us to have any scruples, will it?"

"I suppose not," I answered him. "But what will he want me to do. Be patient with me," I pleaded, "because I'm not used to the ways of the world yet; I'm afraid of everything. Be patient with me."

"I'll be patient with you, dolt!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "In the first place, I suppose you understand that our friend Mr. Murray Olivant happens to take a very deep interest in matters in which you and I once interested ourselves, but with which we now have nothing further to do. In other words, as I have explained to you partly already, there is a new generation grown up in the place you knew; and our friend Olivant knows that generation well. More than that, he knows one at least of the old generation."

I knew to what he referred; I remembered the new Barbara I had seen—so like her mother, and so unconsciously living again, as it seemed, her mother's story. It was so clear to me now that I was almost prepared for the next words Fanshawe said, and they did not come upon me with any real shock.

"And the new generation that is growing up is rather like what the old one was, and is represented by a girl. They call her Barbara. That makes you jump—eh?" he demanded vindictively. "And our friend Murray Olivant takes a deep interest in this Barbara—in other words—loves her."

It was all coming true—it was all happening as I knew instinctively in my own mind it must happen. Fate was marching on grimly enough, and I saw that not only was there a new Barbara and a new Charlie Avaline, but that here, menacing them, was a new Gavin Hockley. I was afraid, and I suppose the terror that was growing up in me showed itself in my

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face. At all events my guardian saw it, but mistook the reason for it.

"There's nothing for you to be frightened about," he said scornfully; "I don't suppose any one is likely to recognize you. You'll only be poor Tinman, the hanger-on and servant; no one is likely to ask questions about you. I don't doubt Murray Olivant will give you plenty of dirty work to do; and you must do it with a smiling face, and be thankful that you've found some one to keep you out of the workhouse. By the way," he added suddenly, as the thought occurred to him—"where have you been last night and to-day?"

"Oh, just wandering about," I replied vaguely; for I did not mean to tell him that I had taken that surprising plunge back into the past. "I have not seen London for so long," I added lamely.

"Well, that's all right; but don't try that game again," he said. "You'll be landing some of us into difficulties, to say nothing of yourself, if you wander about in your present muddle-headed condition. Stay where you can be looked after, and do as you're told."

I meekly promised that I would obey; I ventured presently, as we sat there with the table between us, to put a question or two about the past.

"I want you to tell me," I said—"I want to know what has happened down at Hammerstone Market in all these years. You tell me that a new Barbara has grown up to take the place of the old, but what of the old one?" It was all absurd and impossible, and I was a poor shabby broken grey-haired man, to whom love should mean nothing; but my voice trembled as I asked the question.

"Your old flame?" he sneered. "Dead these many years."

"Dead!" I sprang to my feet and stared at him

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wildly; I remember that he hurriedly pushed his chair back as though to avoid me. "Dead!"

"What is there to get excited about?" he cried. "She couldn't live for ever—and besides, she treated you none too well."

"Dead!" I said again, for that thought had never occurred to me before. I had seen her always young and fresh and unchanged; the curious thing was that I seemed to see her so still, even though this other girl had grown up in her image.

"And the new Barbara—the bit of a girl that our friend Murray Olivant is so interested in—is like the old Barbara come to life again," said Jervis Fanshawe, speaking as if to himself, and with his lips set in a straight bitter line. "I hate her!—I loathe the sight of her. She stands there"—in his excitement he had risen to his feet, and had flung one thin arm above his head—"with the same devilish childish beauty her mother had—that mother that laughed at me, and sent you to rot for twenty years in a prison. I tell you, Charlie"—he dropped into his chair again and leaned across the table, staring at me with wild eyes—"I tell you that I have lain behind a hedge down in that place where she lives—so close to her that I could have risen up and seized her, and crushed the life out of her before she could cry out. Yes—and with these hands!"

"She never harmed you," I reminded him.

"No, but she lives in the image of the woman who laughed at me, and set me aside as something not to be reckoned with. And I've waited, Charlie—by God!—I've waited!"

I did not guess then what was in his mind; I did not realize that the deadly hatred of the man for the one woman he had failed to possess could pass on through all those years, and grow again, stronger for

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the waiting, and rise up stark and strong against the child. I had not understood that any man could live for that and that only; could wait in the snow outside my prison to seize me as an instrument ready to his hand. I did not even then understand the man.

"The Barbara who died—the Barbara I loved," I said gently—"won't you tell me about her?"

"She died at sea," he replied. "Her child had been born, and they said that the mother was not strong; that she had never been the same woman after her marriage. Perhaps she fretted after *you*"—this with a grin and a kick at me under the table that was meant to be facetious. "At all events, the husband was persuaded to take her on a sea voyage, and the child went with them. She fell into a sort of fever—the mother, I mean—and they had to watch her constantly, because it almost seemed that she would take her own life. Then one day her cabin was found to be empty; the ship was searched; but she was gone. A little later the husband found a note written by her; she had made up her mind to end her life, and was only watching for an opportunity to throw herself overboard. She commended the child to his care. And that was the end of her."

Barbara dead! It did not seem possible to my mind, even then when I had chapter and verse for it; I could not set aside that vision I had always had of her—as the bright young girl who had met me in the wood twenty years before. I realized bitterly enough that in that, as in all other things, I had been tricked; that while I dreamed of her in my prison cell, and hugged that dear remembrance to myself, she had been in the depths of the sea, dead and forgotten. I woke now to the consciousness that the cruel voice of Jervis Fanshawe was still talking to me.

"As for the father—Lucas Savell—he has become

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a thing of no account. When old Patton died he left the business to Savell—principally, I think, for the sake of the child; and Savell has let it go to rack and ruin. He was a poor creature always—and I think the loss of Barbara finished him. At any rate, he has gone down and down, and they say he drinks. So far as the business is concerned"—Fanshawe shrugged his shoulders and laughed—"well—that's where Murray Olivant comes in."

"In what way?" I asked.

"Oh, he's a keen blade, is Olivant," said Fanshawe, shaking his head at an imaginary Murray Olivant, and chuckling. "He's always had money—and he always will have it; he's like a bird of prey, ready to stick his talons into the choicest morsels he sees round him. He saw Lucas Savell and the business; he advanced money; and so got a hold here and a hold there, until at last the thing was his. It is supposed to belong to Savell—but he dare not call his soul his own. You needn't look surprised; it has all been a process of years, so gradual that others have not noticed it. Lucas Savell is like a sucked orange, and can be cast aside at any moment."

"Why do you hate them so—I mean, apart from Barbara?" I asked.

Always it seemed that when his supposed wrongs were referred to a sort of semi-madness came upon Jervis Fanshawe, so that he lost control of himself, and was at first unable to speak. Such a madness was upon him now; he had to gasp and open his lips once or twice, and to stretch out a hand towards me, and even clutch at his throat a little before he was able to speak at all. And when he did at last, his voice was hoarse and unnatural with excitement.

"They—they ruined me; they stood me in the dock on charges of forgery and fraud; they forgot

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all my years of service. I had had to get the money from somewhere to satisfy that beast Hockley; I got it from them, meaning to pay it back when the luck changed. It never did change, and Hockley's death finished me. Then, when I came out of prison, old Patton was dead and Savell was established. And I found another man taking my revenge from me, and robbing Savell, and draining him dry. And I wormed myself in with that man, and made myself useful to him—just as you will do, Charlie—just as you're going to do from to-night. He's a fine fellow, this Murray Olivant; he'll break them up, and make a beggar of Savell—and he'll get the girl. Think of that, Charlie; the Barbara for whom you've worn out your heart and your life in prison is dead, and the new Barbara shall be at the beck and call of this man—who won't treat her any too well, I'll warrant. There's a revenge for you!"

I was afraid to ask any direct question as to the boy I had seen with this new Barbara in the wood; I feared that Fanshawe must know at once if I did that I had been down to spy out the land. But I asked, a little wistfully perhaps, a question that artfully concealed what I already knew.

"Is it not possible that this girl—this other Barbara—loves some one else?"

"And what if she does?" he snapped at me; "they've all got fads and fancies, and so much the worse for them. This little fool, for instance, believes herself to be in love with a boy who hasn't a penny—just such a young jackanapes as you were twenty years ago. In fact, he paints, as you tried to do. He's a starveling dog—just as you were."

"Who is he?" I asked.

"He's half-brother to our friend Olivant, whose mother married again, and died when she gave the

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boy to the world. They call him Arnold Millard, and he's dependent on his half-brother for the clothes he wears and the food he eats. And yet, forsooth, has the cheek to step in and pretend to be in love with the girl destined for the other man."

"But her father—Lucas Savell—what does he say?"

"He dare not say anything; it's not in his hands. Our friend Olivant can turn him out neck and crop at a moment's notice, and he knows it. Oh, I can tell you Murray Olivant's a man to be looked up to; he rules every one and everything. Keep in his good books, Charlie, and you'll never starve; but you mustn't offend him. I don't know what would have become of me," he added plaintively, "if I hadn't happened to stumble across him. True, I've done some shady things for him; but he's been very good to me."

I remember that I strove hard for the next day or two, while I awaited orders from my new master, to thrash out in my mind the complicated thing that was before me, that I might work out the pitiful story to the advantage of those in whom I was so passionately interested. For, think of my position! It was my fate to see again two helpless beings striving hard to work out their love story, just as I had striven with Barbara in the old days, and beset on all hands by enemies. This Barbara, who had risen, as it were, from the ashes of her dead mother to take up the burden that mother had laid down, was alone in the world, save for the helpless boy who loved her; and I knew inevitably that stronger forces than any she could combat would bear upon them and drive them asunder. That was inevitable, unless I could do something to help them; and I was an old and broken man, degraded and useless, with my soul stained with murder,

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and with the record of twenty wasted years behind me. I was in despair when I thought about it; it seemed impossible that I could do anything.

Two days later I was told by Jervis Fanshawe that he had received a message from Olivant saying that I was to present myself to that gentleman at once, and take my orders. The better to be sure of me, Fanshawe went with me; he took me to a great house in a fashionable quarter of the town, where I found that Murray Olivant lived in great style in a beautifully furnished flat, with a highly respectable manservant to attend upon him. I know that the man looked at me contemptuously enough as he left us in the hall of the place; my guardian he seemed to know, and told him that Mr. Olivant would see him at once. I was left standing in the hall, when presently Fanshawe was conducted into the presence of his patron; they kept me waiting quite a long time before the manservant appeared again, after a bell had been rung, and told me I was wanted.

"You're to go in there," said the man, jerking his head towards a door at the other side of the hall.

I went in, and found Murray Olivant lounging in a deep chair before the fire; Jervis Fanshawe stood at a little distance from him, a shabby figure indeed in contrast to the other man. Olivant was smoking a big cigar, which he was nervously turning over and over between his teeth, the while he frowned at me through the smoke. I did not speak; I waited again while they discussed what was to be done with me, in that fashion they had used before, quite as though I were a piece of furniture that had been purchased, and for which a place had to be found.

"You'll have to get him some clothes—something dark and respectable," said Olivant. "Get them today; he must go down to Hammerstone Market to-

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night, taking my luggage. Also he'll take a letter from me to Savell; I shall follow to-morrow. Does he remember where the place is, do you think? You Tinman," he called to me; "do you know where Hammerstone Market is?"

"I remember it, sir," I replied.

"You'll have enough money given you to take you down there; you will remember that you are Tinman, my personal servant. You'll have no difficulty about it; they'll put you up at the house. Fanshawe will take you out now, and rig you up properly; you'll be back here by six o'clock. Your train leaves at a few minutes to seven." He turned to Jervis Fanshawe, and spoke impatiently. "Do you think the idiot understands?"

"Perfectly," was the reply. "You don't want him too sharp, you know."

"You're doing splendidly," said Fanshawe, when we were outside the place again. "I can see that you'll be just the very man to do the work he wants; you'll play the dumb dog, and do what you're told, and ask no questions, won't you?"

"Of course," I replied; but I think he was a little disappointed that I should appear to take so little interest in this new life that was being mapped out for me.

Some clothing was bought for me at a second-hand dealer's, and I was rigged out cheaply to fit my new position. I did not see Murray Olivant when I went back to his rooms; his manservant pointed to the luggage that had been packed, and gave me a letter addressed to Lucas Savell, and some money. At the last moment before opening the door the man plucked me by the sleeve, and drew me back, and whispered—

"I say, who are you? and what are you supposed to be? Hang me if I can make you out."

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"It isn't necessary," I replied; "I don't know myself." I went out of the place, carrying some of the luggage, and leaving him to follow with the rest.

A cab was called, and I started; my last vision of the servant was seeing him standing on the pavement outside the house, scratching his chin and staring perplexedly after me. But, in my deeper anxiety as to what was going to happen to me in that strange house at Hammerstone Market, I forgot his very existence by the time the cab had turned the corner.

I reached Hammerstone Market without adventure, took a fly from the station, and drove to the house. Darkness had long since set in, and I could see nothing of the grounds when presently the vehicle turned in at the gates; I could only judge, by the sound of the churning wheels, that we were driving through masses of dead leaves that must have lain there for many past years. Coming to the house at last, I was deposited with the luggage outside the door, and the fly drove away. I stood there in the darkness, hearing a great bell clang somewhere in the distance, and wondering what would be said to me when the door should presently open.

I had no fear that any one would recognize me; the mere thought of that was absurd. Indeed, there was but one disturbing thought in my mind—the fear of meeting the new Barbara, and so of coming face to face with that figure, cut, as it were, out of the life I had once lived in that very place; I feared I should not be able to trust myself or my voice at that time. For the rest, I only knew dimly that I should probably have to see much that might goad me almost to madness, and yet that I must say nothing; I was in a sense fumbling in the dark, with only my memories to guide me.

The door was opened at last, and I stepped, as it

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were, straight back into that night when I had first come to this house with my guardian—twenty years before. Nothing was changed, save only that everything seemed to have dwindled in the years, and that the furniture was shabbier and meaner looking. I felt my heart beating fast as I looked towards that broad staircase down which I had once seen the Barbara who was dead coming, with tears in her eyes, and with her laughing bridesmaids surrounding her. It seemed almost as though she might at any moment turn the corner of the staircase, and come down towards me.

An elderly woman in a dingy black dress took my letter, and bade me stay where I was. She appeared to be a servant; and I watched her as she climbed the stairs slowly, and went away, leaving me standing in the hall. I was looking about me when I heard above a quick, light footstep; looking up, I saw Barbara coming down the stairs, with one hand lightly resting on the rail, and with her eyes turned straight towards me. I stood there watching her; I wondered vaguely what she would have thought had she known who I was, and under what circumstances I had last stood in that place, twenty years before.

When she came up to me she spoke with her mother's tongue, and with a little quick smile that had belonged to the dead woman. "My father sent me to you; he is not—not very well to-night. He understands, of course, that Mr. Olivant is coming down"—the smile died from her lips, and she seemed to draw herself up a little stiffly—"everything shall be got ready for him. You are strange here; you won't know your room. Your name is Tinman?"

I acknowledged the ridiculous title, and at her suggestion carried the luggage up into a room that was evidently to be prepared for Murray Olivant; it was

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a large room on the first floor. My own was at the top of the house—a little meagre room, with odds and ends of furniture in it. I saw that she was looking at me curiously as I stood in this little room; I had a dreadful fear for the moment—ridiculous though it was—that she must know my real name.

"I have given you a lot of trouble, miss," I said, for the want of something better to say.

She shook her head. "Oh, I don't mind," she replied. "You see, in these days, Tinman, we have no servants—at least, only the woman you saw, and a young girl. Not that it matters much, because there is only my father and myself. He wants to see you; will you come down, please?"

I was following her down the half-lighted staircase in that silent house when she turned suddenly, and waited for me; dropped her hand on my arm, and spoke in a whisper. "Have you ever seen ghosts, Tinman?"

"Yes," I faltered, staring at her, and beginning to shake.

"There are ghosts in this house," she whispered, glancing about her quickly. "I hear them rustling on the stairs, and in the old rooms that are shut up, and at night among the trees. You needn't be afraid; they're nothing to do with you."

There were ghosts enough for me in that place, Heaven knows; they were everywhere about me that night. For I was a boy again, dreaming the hopeless dreams of the past, and seeing everywhere the Barbara I had lost in this Barbara of the silent house. I found that Lucas Savell had lost his good-humoured look, and carried a face of fretful melancholy; his hands shook and trembled as he stood looking at me, and holding the letter I had brought.

"Mr. Murray Olivant gives his orders—and we

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obey," he said bitterly, as the letter crackled in his fingers. "We make welcome those he brings or sends to us; we have no choice in the matter." Then, as Barbara laid a light hand on his, he seemed to recollect the part he had to play, and smiled and nodded, and changed his tone. "Of course, he's always welcome—and any one he sends is sure of a welcome," he said. "He comes to-morrow? I'm glad—very glad."

I was left to my own devices that night, after I had had a meal that was provided for me by the woman who had first admitted me to the house. She was a morose, sullen sort of creature, and she asked no questions and gave me no information. As soon as I could escape I went out into the grounds, and walked about there for a time in the long-neglected paths, and on the terrace where long ago I had stood with Barbara on the night she bade me farewell. And presently from the lighted room within the sound of music came, and the new Barbara's voice floated out to me.

I was standing there listening, when I became suddenly alive to the fact that I was not alone on the terrace. I had been standing with half-closed eyes, drinking in the melody, when I became aware that out of the shadows of the garden one shadow had detached itself, and was creeping noiselessly towards the lighted windows. At first the thing was so impalpable, and was, moreover, so unlikely, that I took no notice of it; but presently it stopped just beyond the broad track of light from the windows, and I saw that it was a woman, dressed in black. In that neglected place, and outside that house of ghosts, it was so strange that I felt my hair rise, and a curious tingling sensation in my throat. And for a long time, as it seemed, I remained staring at it, until, just as I was gaining courage to move towards it, I found that it had melted

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into the other shadows of the garden, and was gone. My courage had returned by that time, and I went quickly after it; but, though I looked in all directions, I saw nothing.

I went back to the house, and entered just in time to see Barbara crossing the hall with a tray in her hands, on which was a decanter and a glass; some old instinct made me step forward to relieve her of it; she smiled, and shook her head, but I persisted, and took the tray from her.

"It's very good of you, Tinman," she said; "it's for my father."

I carried the tray into that room that overlooked the terrace, and set it down at Lucas Savell's elbow. He stared at me in surprise for a moment, but said nothing; his daughter, coming after me, asked that I would draw the curtains; I had a pleasant feeling for a moment that she liked to have me there. I moved across to the windows, to fasten the shutters before drawing the curtains; and as I did so glanced back for a moment over my shoulder at her. She was bending over her father, with an arm about his shoulders; she seemed to be pleading with him, and he petulantly setting her aside.

I turned quickly to the window, with the shutter in my hand, and was confronted with a face, staring in. I was so astounded for a moment that I stood there, staring in turn; my eyes seemed to hold the eyes in the white face outside. Then, as I gave a sort of frightened cry, the face was gone, so suddenly that I might never have seen it at all. I fumbled with the window, and got it open, and stepped out on to the terrace. There was no one there.

"Did you speak, Tinman?" asked the girl; and then, as I did not reply, she came near to me. "What's the matter?"

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"I thought—thought I saw some one—something," I replied blunderingly.

She laughed as she helped me with the shutters. "You're seeing the ghosts, Tinman," she whispered.

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CHAPTER IV

THE COMING OF THE WOLVES

I SLEPT but badly that night; it seemed so strange that I should be under that roof in these days of ruin and disaster—hiding, as it were, from the sight of men, and striving to plot, in my own feeble futile way, against forces that must in time inevitably overwhelm and sweep me away. I had been a poor prisoner for so many years; I was like a child in the world now, with whatever powers I had once had dulled and blunted. Passionately I desired to help this girl, who already smiled at me with the eyes of her dead mother, and whose speaking of that absurd name of mine—Tinman—was like a caress. Yet what could I do?—how could I help her or the boy she loved?

I thought, too, more than once of that shadowy figure I had seen on the terrace, hovering like a lost soul outside the house—of that face that had stared in at me from the darkness outside into the room where the father and daughter were. Unless by any chance I had been deceived, who was this woman who moved silently about the grounds at night, and what was her interest in the girl? I tried to dismiss from my mind the whole thing as a mere hallucination—a something bred of all the dreams that once had been mine in that house; but I could not shut out that face that had stared in at me. I remembered how the

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eyes had held mine for one long moment before I cried out; I remembered in a puzzled way that there had been something curiously familiar about them —as though that figure, too, had come out of the dreams of the past to haunt me. I remembered what the girl had said on the staircase about the ghosts in the great dreary house; I found myself sitting up in bed in the dark room, with my hands clasped round my knees, thinking about it all, and asking myself over and over again what I should do. Almost I wished myself back in my cell in prison, with the certain knowledge upon me that nothing could ever disturb me there, and that the world outside was dead. I hated the thought that I had been dragged out again into such a tangle as this.

Better resolves came with the morning; the wintry sunlight seemed to warm me, and to warm any faint resolution that was beginning to shape itself in my mind. I would be strong and watchful; I held a power here that no one suspected, because I knew so much, and had loved so strongly, and was, after all, only a poor creature with whom fate had done its worst and could do no more. Yes—I would be strong.

There was, of course, nothing for me to do, save to kill time; I was allowed to wander about as I liked. Yet there was in me an insane desire to see the girl—to watch this new Barbara that was to me the old Barbara come alive again. I hung about, foolishly enough, on the chance of seeing her—watched her when presently she went out of the house and started for a walk. She was so much to me, and I desired so strongly to watch over her, that I found myself following, perhaps with the fear that some harm might come to her, and that I might be able to prevent it.

I had meant, of course, to keep out of her way; I

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had not intended that she should see me. But as I was going on eagerly to turn the corner of a wall round which she had gone, I came face to face with her; she was turning back, and so had met me. I stood shamed and foolish before her.

"Tinman! Were you following me?"

I could not lie to her; I raised my eyes pleadingly to hers, and stammered that I had followed her from the house.

"But why? Were you spying upon me?" She drew herself up, and looked at me scornfully; I trembled before her like a beaten dog. "I should have remembered that you are the servant of that man," she said.

I had almost flung myself at her feet; I know that I stretched out my hands to her, and clasped them in my frantic eagerness to make her understand. "Don't think that—don't believe it!" I exclaimed. "You don't understand—and I may not tell you; but I am your friend. If I could tell you what is in this poor bruised and broken heart of mine, you would understand, and would pity me and trust me. I am your friend—and his."

"His?" She looked at me with a sudden frown of astonishment.

"The boy you love—the boy who meets you sometimes in secret——"

"Ah! you have been spying, then!" she cried, drawing away from me.

"No—no—no; indeed I have not. It was by the merest accident I saw you meet him in the woods, and no living soul knows of that but myself. If I could only make you trust me!"

She came nearer to me—looked at me closely. "Who are you, or what were you?" she asked in a whisper. "You are no servant; you speak like a

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gentleman. Who are you—and what have you to do with me, or—or with any one else that concerns me?"

"I am one who died long, long ago," I said to her. "If you think of me at all, think of me as some one who long ago touched such a story as yours—such a story of love and hope and faith, all broken and cast in the dust. Think of me as some one who loved—and lost what I loved; think of me as some one who, seeing you as young and fair and bright as the woman I loved, would give the very heart out of me to see you happy. As God's above me, I'm your friend!"

She looked at me in wonder, but I saw that she believed me; I think she was half inclined for a moment to confide in me. If she had done so then, much of the horror and tragedy and despair that were to come upon us both and upon others might have been averted. But I suppose she remembered that I was only Tinman, the servant of the man who had that power over her father and herself; she shook her head perplexedly, and turned away.

"You must not follow me," she said.

"I will not again," I assured her. "But you are the only creature on earth that has spoken gently to me for many, many years; I only followed you as a dog might do, to see that you were safe. Besides, you look at me out of the eyes of a woman I loved—a woman who is dead."

I turned, and went away quickly on the road back to the house. In a moment I heard her calling after me, and I turned about and faced her. "Indeed, I do trust you," she whispered, "and I know that you are my friend. Some day you may have a chance to prove that," she added.

"I pray God the time may come soon," I answered fervently, as I took her little hands in my rough ones,

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and raised them to my lips. It was as though I stood again on that terrace outside the house—a boy of twenty—and bowed my head over the hands of the woman I loved.

I got back to the house in time to see the boy of whom I had been speaking striding towards it. He was but a little in advance of me, and he turned his head sharply on hearing my feet crushing the dead leaves; then waited for me to come up to him. When I reached him he looked me over quickly; I remember that I longed to tell him where Barbara had gone, that he might run to overtake her. But I felt that I had plunged far enough into the story for one day.

"I haven't seen your face before," he said, not ungently. "Do you belong here?"

"Yes, sir—for the present," I replied. "My name is Tinman; I am Mr. Olivant's servant."

He looked at me frowningly for a moment, as we stood together watching each other. "Is my brother here—Mr. Olivant, I mean?"

"He comes to-day, sir, I believe," I replied.

As if in confirmation of my words, I heard the sound of wheels at that moment, and stepped back with young Millard as the fly from the station drove past us towards the house. Murray Olivant was in it; he turned for a moment, and waved a hand towards the young man; me he regarded with a scowl. Arnold Millard walked on quickly after the vehicle, and I followed. The boy was younger and quicker than I was, and he reached the house some few moments before I did. When I got to the door and passed into the hall I saw the pair of them talking—Olivant seated, with his hat on the back of his head, on an oak chest, with his long legs stretched out before him, and the boy facing him. I was obliged to pass them to go into

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the house; I was slipping past when Olivant called to me.

"Tinman, I want you." He turned to his brother, and spoke insolently enough. "That's the last word I have to say about the matter; I can't do anything for you at the moment. You shall have your money all in good time, but you mustn't be so deuced sudden about it. Where are you staying? I didn't know you were down here at all."

"I'm staying at the *George*," said the boy. "But I tell you, you must let me have some money to go on with; I'm nearly penniless. And, after all, Murray, it isn't as if it were your money; you're only holding it for me."

"I know that; I don't need reminding of my responsibilities," retorted the other. "I can't talk about it now," he added, getting up as though to put an end to the conversation. "Come up here to-night—dine here, if you like—and I'll tell you what I'm prepared to do. I can't say more than that. Will you come?"

The boy's face had flushed darkly red; there was a pleased look in his eyes. "Of course I'll come, Murray—if Mr. Savell will have me," he replied eagerly.

Murray Olivant laughed. "Oh, it's nothing to do with Mr. Savell; I do as I like in this house. Dinner at eight; we'll talk business afterwards. Now, Tinman, just come and attend to me, will you?"

He strode away up the stairs, and I meekly followed him; it did not seem at all necessary that he should be announced in that house as having arrived. He curtly told me to unpack his things; cursed me a little because I had forgotten that important duty before. While I unstrapped the luggage, and knelt beside it to take the things out, he seated himself in an easy-chair, and watched me, and asked questions. He

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seemed to be in a good temper, and inclined to be indulgent with me.

"Well, my faithful one, and how do you like coming back among the ghosts?" he asked. Then, as I glanced up at him with what I suppose was a scared look in my eyes, he went on gaily: "There—there—you needn't look so frightened; I won't give the game away. But tell me—what do you think of the place—and the people?—how do you like it all?"

"I have not yet had time to notice anything," I said, without looking up.

"Nonsense; you can't fool me in that fashion. You've been keenly watching everything—eager to find out all you can. What of Savell?"

"He seems much broken and changed," I replied reluctantly.

"Bah!—he's a fool—and a whining fool at that," he exclaimed violently. "He's no good to himself or any one else; he muddles himself with drink night after night; one of these days he'll go off suddenly—snuffed out like a candle in a draught. What of the others?"

"The—others?" I looked up at him stupidly.

"Well, the *other*, if you like," he retorted. "The child—Barbara. What of her?"

"She is very beautiful—and very sweet—and kind," I faltered, bending low over my work.

"Kind, is she?" he said, with a laugh. "So you've begun already to screw your way into her good graces, have you? That's right, Tinman; that's what you're down here for, you old rascal. Watch all she does—follow her about—pounce on any letters that may chance to come for her, and let me see them first. Spy on her, you dog—find out all about her."

I did not answer; I was glad to think that this brute could have so little knowledge of me as to sup-

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pose that I should do it. He was evidently satisfied with my silence; after a moment or two he went on talking again.

"You're going to see company, Tinman. I've got a friend coming down here to stay—man named Dawkins. He's a sly devil, and I may want him; incidentally, you can watch him too. Fanshawe also is coming."

"Jervis Fanshawe?" I looked up at him quickly in surprise.

"Yes, but not here. He'll lie low in the town; I'm going to get a lodging for him. Stirring times, Tinman—eh?"

He got up, and strode about the room, rubbing his hands and laughing; I did not dare ask what was going to happen. Presently he stopped, and faced me as I knelt beside a portmanteau. "Look up at me, Tinman, and speak the truth, if you can. You saw that young man downstairs just now?"

I nodded slowly. "I saw him coming up to the house," I replied truthfully; "he asked who I was, and whether you had arrived."

"Ever seen him before?" he demanded. "Look up at me; I want no lies."

I looked up at him, but I lied nevertheless. "Never,' I replied steadily.

"The young fool thinks he's in love with the girl, and believes that she's in love with him. It's all right while he *thinks* so; but I don't mean to have any nonsense. He's another one to be watched, Tinman; if by any chance you should discover them meeting, or whispering together, or any such nonsense as that—let me know. Do you hear?" He kicked me softly on the leg as he asked the question.

"I hear," I replied.

"Very well then—see that you do it. And don't

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forget, at all times when you may be tempted to do anything against my interests, that I've taken you out of the gutter, and that I'll kick you back there again, to starve, if you don't behave yourself. I don't do dirty work myself; I employ men like you to do it for me. Understand that?" He kicked me softly again, and laughed.

"Yes, I understand," I replied.

"Good. See that you remember it," he retorted. "Understand also that in this house I do as I like, and that my word is law. Above all things, be meek and humble with me, Tinman; I want no fiery words or looks from you. Your fiery youth is gone past, and is done with."

"I know that," I said, almost in a whisper.

"Yet you killed a man once, Tinman, so I've been told," he added musingly. "It doesn't seem possible, when one looks at you now, that you had hot blood in you to that extent. What did it feel like—to kill the man?"

"I have forgotten," I told him. Yet I thought then, as I knelt and looked up at him, that it might be possible that I should know what it felt like again, if he drove me too hard or goaded me too much. The shabby garment of my slavery was slipping off me, rag by rag, and leaving me something of what I had been before; I began to be dimly afraid of myself, and to what my inborn recklessness might drive me. For I, who had died once, had no fear of any consequences. I wondered if he thought of that, or remembered it.

He put an added torture upon me that night; he made me wait at table. I don't know how it was arranged that I should do that; I only know that at the last moment I was told that I must be there to hand the dishes—above all, to stand behind his chair, and wait upon him specially. And so I stood in that

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room where I had once been a guest, and waited upon him and the others humbly enough.

At one end of the table sat Lucas Savell, with his trembling hands fluttering about his plate and his glass; at the other end—defiant, intolerant, insolent,—sat Murray Olivant, talking loudly, and generally dominating the occasion. At one side of the table, at his right hand, sat Barbara, and next to her the man Dawkins—a man who may best be described as one having a perpetual smile. He even seemed to smile as he ate; the most commonplace remark addressed to him was met always with that smile, which seemed indeed a part of the man. It was a smile that became absolutely slavish whenever Murray Olivant threw a word to him; but it was a veiled insolence when Lucas Savell ventured a remark.

On the other side of the table young Arnold Millard was seated, watching the girl. I saw ghosts again then, when I saw Barbara with eyes downcast, and when I watched the boy's hungry glances at her; I—the servant who waited, and was unknown in that house save to one man—saw myself watching hopelessly enough the Barbara who was dead; my heart ached for the boy, as it had ached years before for poor Charlie Avaline.

The insolence of Olivant grew as the meal progressed. I saw him once stretch out his arm, and lay a hand strongly on the hand of the girl as it rested on the table. "Now, my pretty Barbara," he said, "let's have a word from you. You shouldn't be dumb at your father's table."

"Is it my father's table?" she asked him, as she raised her white face for a moment to his.

"Oh, don't let's talk business, for the Lord's sake!" he exclaimed. "At least, you might try to cheer our friend opposite here," he went on, indicating the boy;

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" he's as glum as you are. What's the matter, Arnold ? —are you in love ? "

" I should scarcely talk about it, if I were," replied the boy, with a glance at Olivant, and another at the imprisoned hand of the girl.

" Of course you're in love," went on Olivant, still holding that little hand tightly, and glancing from one to the other across the table. " I wonder what she's like ; I wonder what sort of beauty would most attract you. Come, Dawkins, let's have your opinion."

" Oh, my dear Olivant, don't ask me ! " exclaimed Dawkins protestingly, and smiling more than ever. " Perhaps, if I might hazard a guess——" He glanced as he spoke at Barbara next to him.

" I think Arnold would take rather to a full-blown sort of beauty—something big and high-coloured," broke in Murray Olivant. " He'd be a bit of an amateur at the game—and I doubt if she'd have any money."

" Let go my hand ! " It was the merest whisper, but I heard it as I stood behind Olivant ; I saw the girl's distressed face, and I saw, too, that the boy's hand had gripped a knife beside him, and that his look was absolutely murderous. Olivant bent towards the girl as though he did not understand ; looked down at the hand he held, and laughed.

" But it's such a pretty hand," he said—" belonging to a pretty Barbara. Tell me, Dawkins," he called to the other man, " hasn't one a right to hold a lady's hand if one likes ? "

" Oh, surely, surely," said Mr. Dawkins. " Most certainly."

Even as the words were spoken Barbara wrenched her hand away, and sprang up ; it seemed as though Olivant and the boy sprang to their feet at the same

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time. Barbara went quickly to her father, and whispered him for a moment, while he feebly protested; then she made towards the door. The boy sprang to the door to open it; Olivant moved quickly round the table to intercept them both.

"Here, come back, come back! What the devil——"

The door was opened, and the girl was gone; in the tense silence that had fallen upon the room I heard distinctly what Arnold Millard said, as he stood with his back to the door looking at Olivant.

"Go and sit down!" Then, as the other man still stood blusteringly before him, he made a sudden movement, and I heard the words again: "Go and sit down!"

Murray Olivant backed away from him, and got to his place at the table; sank into his chair with an uncomfortable laugh. The boy, after a moment's hesitation, came back and sat down also. I noticed that Savell's weak hands were fluttering about nervously, but he said nothing, and the meal was resumed in silence. Suddenly, however, Olivant, desiring some vent for his feelings, turned fiercely upon me who was standing looking at him.

"What the devil are you staring like that for?" he demanded ferociously. "Don't you see that my glass is empty?—can't you see that other people want wine also? What in the name of all that's wonderful do you think I keep a lout like you for?"

I went about my duties, and the man relapsed into a sulky silence. He pushed his food away from him, and began to mutter presently that he didn't know what the world was coming to, when puppies were allowed to bully their betters, and when slips of girls failed to understand what a joke was. And at last called down the length of the table to that poor master of the house, Lucas Savell.

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"Come now, Mr. Savell, if you've quite finished we can adjourn. I don't want to sit here all night."

"Quite finished, Olivant, quite finished," said Savell hastily, as he rose from his chair. "Sorry there should have been any little unpleasantness—but perhaps you don't quite understand the child. She didn't mean any unkindness——" His voice trailed off, as he went muttering and mumbling from the room. At a sign from Olivant the man Dawkins followed him; Olivant remained behind with the boy. Of me he took no notice; I was but a piece of furniture in his eyes.

"Well, my friend," began Murray Olivant, setting one foot upon a chair, and leaning his arm on his raised knee—"I believe you want some money, don't you? Don't be afraid to speak; you must surely understand that I am in the best mood for giving you all you ask."

"I have asked for nothing," replied Arnold. "One thing, however, I demand."

"Hear him, Tinman; he demands something, this young jackanapes," exclaimed Olivant, turning to me, and so dragging me into the business.

"I demand that you shall behave decently to that young lady whom you insulted just now," said the boy, growing very white, but speaking very distinctly. "You dare not play the brute and the bully with men, not even when, like my unlucky self, they're poor as Job and are dependent upon you; you must bully women instead."

"Silence—you young fool!" exclaimed Olivant. "Do you think I'll be browbeaten by you? As for your money, you can wait for it until I choose to give it to you."

"There is no question of any gift; the money belongs to me by right," exclaimed the boy. "I have had to beg for every penny that I have ever had, al-

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though it has all been mine from the beginning; if I can't get it from you, I'll take some other measures—legally."

"Hear this beggar, Tinman; hear what he's going to do!" cried Olivant, pointing to the boy, but looking round at me. "It's a proper way to get what you want, that is." He took a turn or two about the room, and then came back to where Arnold was still standing. "Let's have an understanding—once for all," he said, in a changed voice. "Before you go out of this house I want you to know that this tone of yours must cease. You'll have money when I care to pay it to you; and for the future you'll keep out of my way, and out of the way of my friends. You have dared to lecture me as to how I shall behave to this pretty baggage in this house; she's nothing to you, and never will be. One of these days she's going to belong to me—by her father's wish; you'll find yourself left out in the cold. I can put up with a boy's foolish whims and tricks for a time; but I've put up with yours too long. Now you can go."

"I shall go when it suits me; this house is not yours," replied the other coolly, as he walked to the door, and opened it, and went out.

After a moment or two Murray Olivant followed him; he seemed at a loss to know what to do. I heard his voice raised presently in the room on the other side of the hall; I opened the door and listened. I was able to see out into the hall also; I saw that Lucas Savell stood at the foot of the stairs, as if he were just about to climb them, and that Olivant was speaking to him in his strident voice.

"Fetch her down, I say. I won't have her sulking upstairs. If she won't come for you, I'll come myself."

"My dear Olivant!" began Savell pleadingly; but the brutal voice broke in again quickly.

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"There—no words about it; tell her she's to come down. It's an insult to me and to my guest."

Savell went slowly up the stairs, and Olivant went back into the other room. Presently, through the half-opened door, I saw Savell returning, with Barbara walking by his side; she walked stiff and straight, as her mother once had done on that very staircase, when she went out of the house for the last time with her husband. They disappeared together into that other room.

For my own part, I was in a fever of doubt and dread; I did not know what was going to happen. I knew that presently the boy must leave the house in any case; I knew, too, that that useless father would presently drink himself into a muddled condition, and so would remain, until in the small hours he contrived to crawl away to bed. And I doubted and feared the temper of Murray Olivant, as much as I doubted and feared that perpetual smile on the face of his friend Dawkins. I resolved to watch and to wait; for this night at least I was again that unhappy boy, Charlie Avaline, who had once suffered such tortures as young Arnold Millard must be suffering now.

I crept out on to the terrace, outside those lighted windows; peering in, I saw Olivant lounging at the piano, evidently talking to the girl, who was seated there; young Millard was listening to something Dawkins was saying, but was evidently paying no attention to him; his eyes were upon the two at the piano. Presently, as if he could bear it no longer, he made a movement to go; shook hands with Savell, who feebly responded, and then crossed towards Barbara. She rose to meet him, and with a courage for which I should scarcely have given her credit, walked with him towards the door. But even there Olivant interposed; took the girl by the arm, and drew her

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away. I saw the look in the boy's eyes, and it sunk deep into my mind, so that I did not lightly forget it.

I went back into the house, and presently made my way up towards my room. While I was yet on the stairs, a door down below me opened; peering over, I saw Barbara come out into the hall. At the same moment Murray Olivant came out also, and behind him in the doorway I saw the smiling face of Dawkins. Olivant seized the girl before she had set foot upon the stairs.

"Come, my dear, you're not going like that!" His voice was thick and unsteady as he lurched against her.

"Let me go!" she cried, in a subdued voice. "Let me go, Mr. Olivant—or shall I call my father?"

"Call him, by all means; he's not likely to hear, or to trouble much if he does hear," exclaimed Olivant. "Come, you little witch—you're only shy because Dawkins is looking on. You shall kiss me good-night at least!"

She broke away from him, and darted up the stairs. He stumbled in his blind rush after her, and she fled past me like a hare; I heard her sobbing as she went, and it seemed to set my numbed blood on fire. As he stumbled up the stairs he came suddenly face to face with me, standing looking at him. Dawkins, still grinning awkwardly, stood in the doorway below.

"Out of the way, you fool!" exclaimed Olivant, making a rush at me; but I did not move. I stood like a thing of stone, staring at him, although in my heart I was desperately afraid. Not of him—never of him for a moment; but of what I might do.

"Stand back!" I said, in a voice that was not in the least like my own. "Stand back!"

"What do you mean?" he asked, involuntarily recoiling a step.

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"Stand back!" I said again. "I killed a man once; there is a dread in me that I might do it again!"

He slowly retreated down two or three steps, still looking at me; muttered something about talking to me in the morning; then stumbled down to rejoin his friend, and disappeared with him into the room. And I sat on the stairs in the darkness, shaking from head to foot, and desperately afraid of myself.

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CHAPTER V

I TOUCH DISASTER

I KEPT that watch upon the stairs until long after the house was quiet. I drew back into a recess once, when Murray Olivant and Dawkins went roaring up to their respective rooms; and again when presently Lucas Savell fumbled his trembling way up to his particular quarters. Even after that there was a great deal of noise for a time, because Dawkins and Olivant appeared to take a particular delight in shouting to each other from one room to the other as they undressed.

But presently even they were quiet, and the dreary old house seemed to sink deeper and deeper into the shadows of the night. Keeping my lonely watch there, I dreamed of all that had happened in the years that were dead; thought chiefly, too, of my own utter helplessness now. I was to have been strong and purposeful; I was to have helped those who, like myself in an earlier time, were helpless; I laughed bitterly to think how weak I was, and how little I could do. I tried to tell myself what my years were, and how I ought to be strong and lusty; and then I remembered that my hair was grey, and my face shrunken and old, and my body weak. I had thought that I could cope with the powers of position and strength and riches; and I could do nothing.

Thinking I heard a noise above, I determined at last

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that I would not go to bed yet; the girl seemed so absolutely alone in that great house. I knew the room in which she slept, and I presently crept up there, and lay down across her doorway, to snatch some sleep in that fashion. Even as I fell asleep I smiled to think that it might have been the old Barbara I was guarding, and not this new one, after all.

I awoke with a light on my face, and the consciousness that some one was looking down at me. I started up in a sitting posture, only half awake, and saw that the door of the room was open, and that Barbara stood there, with a candle in her hand, bending over me. Our faces were very close together when she spoke in a surprised whisper—

"Tinman! What are you doing there?"

"I did not mean that you should be disturbed," I said. "I only wanted to feel that you were safe."

"Dear kind Tinman!" she whispered, as the tears gathered in her eyes. "I have not slept at all; I have lain awake—thinking. You moved in your sleep, I think, and brushed against the door, and I wondered what it was. Come inside a moment."

She spoke in the faintest whisper, stopping every now and then to listen intently. I got slowly to my feet, and went just inside the door of the room; she closed the door, and stood there with the candle in her hand, looking at me. I remember that she looked very frail and young, with her hair falling about her shoulders.

"What am I to do, Tinman?" she asked.

I shook my head. "Indeed, I don't know," I replied. "Life is always so hard, and there are so many to make it harder for us. You did not quite trust me to-day when I spoke to you," I added regretfully, "or I might be able to speak to you more frankly."

"I do trust you," she said earnestly. "You stood

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between me and that brute to-night; I peeped out and saw you. I could not hear what you said; I only saw him go down again. I bless you for that, Tinman."

"You see me only as a servant," I whispered, "but I was not always like that. I want to say to you what is in my heart. Your eyes smile at me, and so I can speak with more confidence. You love this boy?"

To my surprise she was not in the least annoyed at my bluntness of speech; she blushed quickly and prettily, and nodded. "Yes," she said.

"And it is easy to see that he loves you. And you ask me what you are to do?" I went on. "Surely it is in your own hands, and in his?"

"But I would like you to tell me," she coaxed. "Of course I know in my own mind what I want to do, or I suppose I shouldn't be a woman; but one likes to hear what a friend will say about a matter like this. Tell me."

"I should advise you—both of you—to get away from this house, and to start your lives in the best sense somewhere else," I whispered earnestly. "You have no friends here—no, not even your father; he would marry you to this other man in sheer dread of him. Youth only comes to you once, child, and you must grasp it with both hands, and hold it as long as possible. Take your lives into your hands, and go away, out into the big clean world that loves lovers."

"You say just what is in my own heart, Tinman," she whispered, smiling, "and you speak as though you knew all about it."

"Oh, ever so long ago I knew something about it—and one never forgets. My life went down into the shadowy places of the world, and was wrecked and lost; I would not have yours do that."

"Why do you think so tenderly of me?" she asked.

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"Because you look at me with the eyes of the woman I loved," I answered her.

"Where is she now?—what became of her?" she whispered gently.

"She's dead."

She took my rough hand, and gave it a little squeeze. I opened the door to go out, and she whispered that I had comforted her, and that now she could sleep. For a little time after that I sat outside the door, with my arms round my knees, staring into the darkness, and thinking that, after all, God had blessed me rather more than I deserved. In the grey dawn I stole up to my room at the top of the house, and lay down, dressed as I was, on the bed to snatch some further sleep.

It was late next morning when I heard Murray Olivant bawling my name, and demanding with oaths to know where I was. Somehow or other some of my dread of the man had left me; I had a power I had not before guessed at. I went to find him. and stood before him—a stronger man than he, in the sense that I was calm and silent, while he raved at me, and cursed me, and showed himself a meaner, smaller thing with every word he spluttered out. And I think he knew it, and chafed at that violence he could not repress.

"There's something I want to say to you," he said at last when he had exhausted himself a little. "You threatened me last night—actually had the audacity to threaten me, and to boast about what you had done, and what you might do again."

"I did not threaten you—and I did not boast," I said slowly. "And I only told you that I was afraid—afraid of what I might do."

"Well, that was a threat. You talked of killing a man—hinted that you might do it again. You know what I told you would happen if you gave me any

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trouble. I said I'd kick you into the gutter—and I'll do it. You can go to-day; get back to London, and shiver in its streets—sell matches or beg. I've done with you."

"Not yet," I replied, shaking my head. "You will not get rid of me so easily as that, Mr. Olivant."

He stared at me with a dropping jaw. "Why, what the devil do you mean?"

"I mean that you will find it better to have me with you than against you," I said. "If you wanted an ordinary servant, you should have taken an ordinary man; you have taken me, who have nothing to lose, and who troubles nothing about what he may gain. Don't you understand," I asked impatiently, "that I have stood under the shadow of the gallows, with Death beckoning; what more have I to be afraid of? If you kick me into the gutter, as you term it, I shall only rise up again, and fight against you. More than that, I might do worse; I might kill you if you gave me too much trouble."

I must say one thing for Murray Olivant; he had a sense of humour. He stared at me for a moment or two after I had finished speaking, and then sat down, and began to laugh. He laughed more and more as he let my words sink into his mind; and finally sat up and looked at me, shaking his head whimsically as he did so.

"My word!—but you're a cool one!" he exclaimed. "So you think I'm not to shake you off—eh? I'm not to have a word to say about the matter; you're to play a sort of old-man-of-the-sea to my Sindbad, are you? Well, I think I like you for it—and I think you may be more useful because you have so little to lose. Only you mustn't threaten, and you mustn't get in my way again when I've a joke afoot. We'll say no more about it; we'll forget it." He

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got to his feet, and went striding about the room, laughing to himself as at some excellent jest. "You might even kill me! Oh, Lord—what a man I've saddled myself with, to be sure!"

I stood still, waiting until he should have got over the fit of laughter that was upon him; I waited grimly for whatever other move might come. Presently he sidled up to me, and with his arms akimbo dug at me sideways with one elbow, and grinned into my face.

"Protector of the poor, and the weak, and the helpless—eh?" he taunted. "A sort of elderly Cupid, setting out in the world fully equipped save for the wings. Tell me, Cupid—what plot is hatching? What are they going to do—these lovers?"

"I didn't know they were lovers," I replied. "I thought *you'd* seen to that."

"And I have," he exclaimed, with sudden heat. "You may be sure of that. The boy may fly into tantrums, and the girl may sulk and cry—but the poor folks can't do anything. I hold the money-bags, and I can afford to let these people weep, and gnash their teeth, and cry out against me; I shall have my own way in the long run."

"You always do, you know," I reminded him slily.

"Of course I do, Tinman," he assented. "But won't you tell me what plot's afoot, or what the simpletons think of doing? What's the game: do they kill me first, and run away together afterwards—or is old Savell to be brought to his knees—or what's the game?"

"I don't know of any game," I said. "As you have already said, the game's in your hands, and I expect you'll win it in the long run."

"Of course I shall," he cried quickly. "Only you're

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a devilish sly fox, and I'm rather suspicious that you may be thinking of playing tricks. For your own sake, Tinman, you'd better not."

So soon as he had dismissed me I went off to try and find Barbara. My position in the house did not make that an easy task; for she was with her father, and I had no excuse for breaking in upon them. I went into the grounds at last, in the hope that she might come out there, and that I might have a chance to speak to her. But I had to wait for a long time before she came towards me, trailing through the dead leaves dejectedly enough. I watched her out of sight of the house, and then went towards her.

She seemed glad to see me—grateful for what I had done, and eager to thank me again. I urged upon her the necessity for seeing young Millard at the earliest possible moment, and making some arrangement with him.

"I dare not go away from the house," she said, glancing at its windows through the trees. "I am watched everywhere, and I might bring fresh trouble upon you. After last night, Tinman, I am afraid to see those two men together."

I thought for a moment or two, and then turned quickly to her. "I can see him," I said, "and arrange with him what is best to be done. I'll slip down into the town and try to find him. You must get away, both of you; there is nothing else to be done." I was as eager as a boy about it; I wanted to see them running off into the world, hand in hand, to face it together.

"Go to him then," she said, "and tell him that I will do anything and everything he suggests. Only pray him, for the love of God, to let it be soon. I cannot stay much longer in this house."

I had just begun to assure her that I would slip

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away at the earliest opportunity when a change in her face warned me that some one was approaching us; I turned guiltily, and saw, not a dozen yards away, the man Dawkins, as smiling as ever, lighting a cigarette. I did not know where he had sprung from, nor how long he had seen us talking together; from his appearance he might have been taking an aimless stroll through the grounds, and so have lighted upon us suddenly.

"Good morning, Miss Savell," he said, ignoring me, and waving a hand to the girl. "We've been disconsolate without you—wondering what had happened to you, and all that sort of thing."

"I have been with my father," she replied hastily, making a movement towards the house. "You will not forget, Tinman," she called back to me, as though reminding me of some order she had given me.

"No, miss; I will not forget," I said. I watched her as she walked back to the house, with Dawkins strolling beside her, evidently talking airily as he waved his cigarette.

It must have been an hour after that, and I had not yet found an opportunity to get away, when Murray Olivant summoned me, and told me he was starting at once for London. I found him in a room with Dawkins—the latter was seated in an armchair, reading a newspaper and smoking; he took no notice of Olivant or of myself. Olivant, for his part, seemed worried about something; mentioned to me quite confidentially that he had decided to go to London that day, on account of some sudden business he had forgotten. He was quite cordial with me; told me to put a few things together in a bag, as he did not expect to be back that night.

I saw in a moment in this the golden opportunity for

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which we were all waiting. With Olivant out of the way we might do anything; for I did not reckon Dawkins in the matter at all. If I thought about him in any way, it was as an amiable fool, who had nothing to do with the matter.

I packed the bag, and then quite naturally suggested that I should carry it to the station in the town. Olivant thanked me quite cordially, and said he should be glad; and I laughed to think how easily and naturally I was going to get down into the town of Hammerstone Market, to find young Arnold Millard. I think I rather despised Murray Olivant for being so simple over the matter.

"Why don't you come with me, Dawkins?" asked Olivant at the last moment as we were starting. "There's nothing for you to do here, you know."

"No, thanks," growled the other from behind his paper. "I'm jolly comfortable."

"Oh, all right," retorted his friend. "Ring the bell if you want anything; Tinman will look after you."

We set off to walk to the station; I understood from Olivant that there was a train he would quite easily catch. I wondered what he would say when he returned from London on the following day, and discovered, as in all probability he would, that the two poor birds he was trying to crush had flown. I was quite exultant over the way things were playing into my hand; I found myself mapping out in my mind exactly what I should say to him, when on his return he should demand an explanation.

He had some ten minutes to wait when we reached the station; he lit a cigar, and began to pace up and down the platform, with his mind evidently bent on the expedition before him. I stood obediently near his bag, waiting to hand it to him when the

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train should arrive, and going over in my own mind how I should set about the task before me. Suddenly Olivant strolled towards me, watch in hand.

"You'd better not wait, Tinman," he said, more kindly than he had spoken yet. "It's a cold morning, and there's no necessity for you to stand about here. Thanks for carrying the bag; I can manage with it now."

"I don't mind waiting in the least," I began; but he pushed me away good-naturedly.

"Nonsense; get off with you!" he cried. "And don't forget what I told you about being watchful," he added in a lower tone, and with his hand on my shoulder. "Not one alone, mind—but everybody."

I went out of the station, and took my way down into the town. I had scarcely gone a hundred yards when I heard the whistle of the train in the distance; I stood still in the little High Street, pleasing myself with the thought of how at this moment Olivant was opening a carriage door, and now was in the carriage ready for his journey. I heard the whistle of the train again, and knew that he had started on that long journey to London, and that I was free. I laughed to myself, and turned round, and went on my way in search of Arnold Millard.

I failed to find him at the little hotel in the town; they told me there that he had gone out, and would probably not be back until much later in the day. I chafed at the delay, because I knew that time was of value, and whatever had to be done must be done before Olivant returned. While I was standing in the High Street, wondering what I should do, I felt a touch upon my arm, and turned, to see Jervis Fanshawe standing beside me. He beckoned to me mysteriously, and I followed him down a little lane

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which turned off from the main street of the town, and led down among some tumbledown cottages. There he stopped, and fronted me, with a nervous grin upon his face.

"Well, Brother Derelict," he said, "and how are things going with our friend? What takes Murray Olivant to London just now?"

"Business," I replied shortly. "He won't be back until to-morrow."

"And in the meantime you plot mischief—eh?" he suggested. "Oh, I know you—and I know what you mean to do—and I don't blame you. Serve the brute while it pays you, but work behind his back all the same. That's the ticket."

"I don't understand you," I replied, looking at him steadily. "I've just seen Mr. Olivant off at the station, and I'm now going back to my duties at the house."

"Exactly," he sneered, as he thrust his face into mine. "And that was the reason that you went into the *George* just now, and so anxiously inquired concerning the whereabouts of our young friend Millard—eh? I was in the bar at the side, and heard every word. Idiot!—why can't you be more candid with me? I only want to work with you; I'm not against you."

"I'm not so sure of that," I replied. "At all events, I mean to do whatever is in my mind solely on my own account. I'm fighting now not only for the boy, but for my own dead boyhood, away back in the past. It won't be wise of you if you attempt to stop me."

"My dear Charlie, I'd be the last to stop you," he asserted, seizing my hand and giving it a squeeze. "We work together; our interests are the same. Trust me, Charlie—you'll never regret it."

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"I don't intend to trust any one," I said. Then, in an incautious moment, I added exultantly—"I mean to snatch both these young people out of the clutches of Olivant; I mean to set them free. And not you nor all the world shall prevent me."

"My dear boy, I wouldn't prevent you, even if I could. It won't be half a bad thing to do; I shall be quite pleased for you to take a rise out of Murray Olivant; I hate the man."

"Your feelings have changed somewhat too rapidly," I said. "I won't trust you, Fanshawe."

"Well, I'll help you, whether you like it or not," he said, with a laugh. "Young Millard has gone down into the woods. I followed him there not an hour ago."

I looked at the man doubtfully; I did not know what to believe. I was so utterly alone in this business of plotting and counterplotting, and I wanted so much to rely on some one for help and advice. I decided, however, that I would have nothing to do with him; with a nod I turned away.

"You'll be sorry," he called after me. "I could help you if you'd let me."

I took no notice of him; I went on my way steadily. I began even to regret that I had made that bombastic speech to him about snatching the two young people out of the clutches of Murray Olivant. I saw that there was the more need for hurry; I went on with long strides towards the wood.

After a long search I found the boy; he was making rough sketches of a part of the wood, not with any serious intention to work, I am convinced, but because he hoped that Barbara might pass that way. I stole upon him unawares; suddenly presented myself before him, and blurted out what I wanted to say.

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"Mr. Millard, I have been looking for you everywhere," I said. "It is on account of Miss Barbara Savell."

He turned to me quickly. "Do you come from her?" he asked.

"Yes—and no," I faltered. "Last night, after you had gone, the man Olivant tried to insult her; I was so lucky as to be in the way—and I—I stayed near her for the rest of the night. You must take her away from that house at once."

"I'll go to the house first, and see Olivant," he exclaimed fiercely, as he began to pack up his things. "Tried to insult her, did he?" While he spoke he was savagely tugging at straps and buckles, in a violent hurry to start.

"Stop!" I entreated. "In the first place, Olivant is not there; he's gone to London."

"Are you sure?" He looked up at me quickly.

"I have seen him start myself," I assured him. "This is your opportunity; let him come back to find the bird flown. If the child were here, she would be able to explain to you so much better than I can—would be able to tell you that I am her friend and yours—fighting for you both, for a reason you will never understand. You must take her away, out of that frightful house; you must marry her—and face the world with her."

"Why—has she told you—about me?" He had got to his feet, and was looking at me curiously. "What has she told you?"

"That she loves you," I replied simply. "I that am but a poor servant—a nobody in the world—tell you this, and beg you with all the strength that is in me to take her away. She will go gladly; she will make your life what it could never be without her."

"You're a strange man," he said wonderingly.

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"But if she trusts you—well, so will I. What is best to be done?"

"There is another man in the house—left behind by Olivant," I replied eagerly—"and he will have his instructions, no doubt, to be on guard. If you will wait till darkness sets in, I will arrange that Miss Barbara shall slip out of the house, and meet you where you like. It must be to-night; to-morrow will be too late."

"Why could she not come earlier?" demanded the boy. "There is the rest of the day before us; surely she could slip away?"

"And be called for by her father, or watched and followed by the man Dawkins," I reminded him. "No; if she slips away after her father and Dawkins have settled down for the evening, there will be time for you to get to the junction, and get a train from there to London; she will not be missed for hours—perhaps not till the morning—and then pursuit would be useless. Give me a message to her, and I will go back at once and deliver it."

"Could you not manage to bring her to me, Tinman?" he suggested suddenly. "If they were watching, it would not do for me to come too near the house, and I do not like the thought of her wandering about in the darkness by herself."

"Yes, I could do that easily," I replied, "as Olivant is away. But you must arrange a meeting-place."

"I will be at the point on the road where the path leaves it to enter this wood," he said, after a moment's thought. "I can stand back among the trees there, and watch you coming. I will not leave that spot until you come, however late it is. The rest must be a matter of chance. If we can't reach the junction in time for the train, I'll find a cottage somewhere,

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and some good woman into whose hands I can put the girl. I'll write a note to her now, just to tell her that she is to put herself in your hands."

He tore a sheet of paper from his sketch-book, and rapidly wrote. "That is just to tell her that I will be waiting, and that you are to bring her to me," he said, as he folded the paper and gave it to me. "Some day, Tinman, my dear wife and I will be able to thank you. I wish I knew why you have done this."

"Perhaps some day you may know that too," I replied, as I thrust the paper into my pocket. "I shall be at the spot you mention at about eight o'clock."

I went back to the house, and was fortunate enough to find Barbara at once. She was crossing the hall, and I stopped her eagerly, and began to whisper the message, even while I fumbled clumsily in my pockets for the note.

"I've seen Mr. Millard, and he has arranged everything," I began. "You are to meet to-night at the end of the path leading into the wood——"

"Yes, I shall want you to wait at lunch, Tinman," she broke in loudly, and drawing away a little. I knew at once that we had a listener; as I bowed and turned away, I saw the man Dawkins standing in the doorway of the dining-room. He smiled with that dazzling smile of his at Barbara; transferred the smile to me when he asked me to be good enough to get him a whisky and soda. There was nothing for it but for me to turn away; I saw his eyes following me, and I knew that I dared not pass the note to the girl then. As she moved away a little, however, I went after her with a quick—"Excuse me, miss," and whispered again: "Be ready at eight at the outer gate of the grounds. I will be there to take you."

I strove during the remainder of that day to deliver

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up that twisted scrap of paper I had in my pocket; but I was baulked on every occasion. Now it was Savell who came suddenly upon us as I was approaching Barbara; now it was Dawkins, strolling about the house, and bringing his smile to bear suddenly round a corner. Once when I went to her room I found it empty, and I dared not leave the thing there. The day wore on, and I was counting the hours until the moment should arrive when I could meet her in the grounds.

It was more than half-past seven, and the house was very still, when I thought I heard a noise in one of the rooms above. Thinking it might be Barbara moving about, and that here was the opportunity to speak to her, I stole cautiously upstairs. The sound came from Murray Olivant's bedroom; I opened the door quickly, and walked in. Some one was standing at the further side of the room, in the dim light that came through the windows; but before I could see who it was, I felt myself seized in a powerful grip from behind, and forced to my knees. I was too surprised even to cry out; but I had a vague idea that something dreadful had happened to me and to my schemes, when the figure at the further end of the room twisted quickly round, and turned up the gas, which had been burning as a mere tiny speck of light. Then I saw that the man was Murray Olivant.

I was going to cry out in earnest then, with some vague idea of raising an alarm, when I felt a twisted cloth forced into my mouth and tied tightly behind; my arms were already secured. So I remained on my knees, helpless; I turned my head, and saw Dawkins standing beside me, smiling as delightfully as ever.

"Thank you, Dawkins," said Murray Olivant, with a nod; "that was rather neatly done. Now,

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will you have the goodness to run through his pockets, and see if you can find anything ? "

I made a feeble attempt to struggle, but it was useless. The deft fingers of Mr. Dawkins swiftly brought to light the note that young Millard had written but a few hours before ; he tossed it across to Olivant. The latter opened it slowly, and read what was written there by the light of the gas jet. Then he turned to me, and shook his head.

" Oh, you sly devil ! " he said in a whisper.

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CHAPTER VI

LOVE WITH THE VEILED FACE

I CROUCHED there on the floor, with my arms securely pinioned behind me, and unable to cry out. The man Dawkins had seated himself, after making certain that he had secured me; Murray Olivant had finished his perusal of the note, and was standing tapping his lips with it, evidently deep in thought. He pulled out his watch and looked at it; slipped the watch back into his pocket, and turned again to the note. He read it aloud—with interpolations of his own.

"MY DEAREST (like his impudence, I must say!),—

"That good fellow Tinman (oh, you sly devil!) will tell you what I have decided to do. I will be waiting at the path that leads into the wood at about eight o'clock; you are to come with Tinman without fear (brave, sweet, kind Tinman, so very useful in a crisis!). He will bring you to me, and after that you will have nothing to trouble about. Trust me as much as I know you love me, and all will be well. Until we meet in an hour or two,

"Ever your own,

"ARNOLD."

He twisted up the note, and came slowly across the room to where I crouched waiting. While he

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talked to me, in that hard deadly level voice of his, he launched a kick at me every now and then to punctuate what he said.

"You thought I was safely out of the way."—A kick.—"You meant to play me false, and send this boy flying, with love for company—eh?"—Another kick.—"You dog!—do you think you're likely to win in such a game as this, when you're fighting against me?"—Another kick more savage than the others.—"Look at him, Dawkins; see how brave he is now!"

If I could have got my hands free, I know that I should have made a fight for it, and that in my despair I might have killed or maimed one or other of the men. But I was too tightly bound to be able to move; Dawkins had most skilfully knotted a long bath towel about my elbows, so that my shoulders ached with the strain upon them. I struggled to my feet, and leant against the wall, glancing from one man to the other, and wondering what they meant to do.

"I set you to watch, my dear Tinman," said Murray Olivant between his teeth; "and the better to be sure of you, I had you watched also. You've interested yourself a little too much in regard to this young lady, who, at the present moment I expect, is waiting in the cold and the darkness for you. That's a pleasant thought, isn't it? There they stand—the pair of them; the girl, impatient to hear your footstep; the boy, shivering at the edge of the wood, waiting for you both. Think of that, Tinman; they so near together, and never by any chance to meet." . . .

I stood there, with the sweat dropping off me, straining vainly at my bonds, and striving to work the gag loose with my teeth. Olivant laughed at my struggles; flicked the note at me, and went on derisively—

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"Our friend Dawkins here gave me the tip this morning, and I decided that it might be a good idea to make you believe that you'd got the day and the night to yourself. I didn't get into the train, and my luggage is still at the station. I came back, after a decent interval, and waited for you, Tinman. Now the only thing to be decided—and we have just ten minutes in which to decide it, unless we are to keep the lady waiting in the cold—is what to do in regard to these two people, who stand so far apart, longing for you to bring them together. I can't remove your gag, Tinman, or you might shout; but I should like to know what you would do if the choice rested with you."

I stood there, enduring a torture greater than any I had endured yet. I seemed to see Arnold Millard standing at the edge of the wood, waiting and longing and hoping; saw the girl watching the house in which I was held prisoner, and miserably blaming me in her heart for having turned traitor. The two men in the room with me must have guessed what was passing in my mind; they were whispering together, and shaking with laughter.

"But you shan't go disappointed, Tinman; that wouldn't be fair," exclaimed Olivant after a pause. "You may not go yourself to meet the lady, but you shall send a letter to her; we must be polite at all costs. You shall explain that you are unavoidably detained; more than that, you shall send some one in your place. Dawkins shall take up the tale you have begun; Dawkins is quite the ladies' man at a pinch—aren't you, Dawkins?"

"I'm always for a bit of sport," exclaimed Mr. Dawkins, grinning.

Murray Olivant went across to a window, and pulled aside the curtain; he looked cautiously out into the

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grounds. After a moment he turned, and jerked his head, as a sign to the other man to join him.

"There she is, Dawkins—there by the gate," he said, in a low voice. "See how patiently she waits—how certain she is that the faithful Tinman will not fail her in this hour of need! You can see the moonlight on her, Dawkins—and mighty pretty she looks!"

I went across the room suddenly, and fell upon my knees before the man, and raised my face to his. I could not speak, but I tried to throw into my expression the prayer to him that was in my heart. He watched me as he might have watched some one with whom he was not concerned at all; touched the man Dawkins on the arm, to call his attention to me. Then suddenly his manner changed; he bent down and looked into my eyes, and spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"You have set your puny strength against mine, and have learnt your lesson," he said. "Now you shall hear what I mean to do—you shall understand what you and the impudent dog who pretends to love her have brought upon her. I meant to marry her; that was part of the plan I had formed, if she had behaved properly and as her father wished. But her kisses have been for her lover, and for that she shall pay. I'll have her taken away to-night under false pretences—I'll drag her down through the mud; she shall crawl to my feet, and beg me to kill her for very shame of what she is. And then I'll send her back to the boy she set before me. And you, Tinman—you, my jail-bird—you will have done it!"

I knelt there in agony, praying madly and vainly that God would set me free or strike me dead. Olivant had turned to Dawkins; together they were examining the note they had found upon me.

"It's scarcely likely that she knows this fellow's

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writing," said Olivant, indicating me with a glance. "If you're careful you can take a note to her that will seem to come from him; you're a plausible rascal, Dawkins, and she may fall into the trap. You know where the boy's waiting; we'll tell her the plan's been changed, and she's to go in the other direction. Take her to London, and wait instructions there. Now for a little forgery in a gentle cause."

They chuckled together over the note that was to be signed with my name. It was short enough, and they brought it to me that I might hear it read.

"I am suspected, and dare not leave the house. I have had to change the plan at the last moment, but have been lucky enough to find a good friend to help you and Mr. Millard. I thought he was a friend only of Mr. Olivant, but in that I was mistaken. Trust him completely; he will take you straight to Mr. Millard. This is the only way in which it can be managed; if I left the house now I should be followed.

"TINMAN."

"By Jove—that's devilish clever!" exclaimed Mr. Dawkins, looking at it in admiration. "The only thing is—I'm afraid the lady may be suspicious."

"That's quite unlikely," said Murray Olivant impatiently. "The mere fact of your carrying a note signed by Tinman shows that you must know all about the business, and you can only have known all about it from him. To London with her; I'll join you in twenty-four hours, after I've decided what to do with this fellow and with my worthy half-brother. I must tread warily, for I have two desperate men to settle accounts with." He laughed, and kicked me softly again.

Dawkins shook hands with him, and went out of

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the room, closing the door after him. Olivant turned the key in the door, as though he feared I might run out, bound and gagged as I was, to try to stop her; and indeed that thought had been in my mind. Then he took up his position at the window, and with a mocking smile on his face began to describe what was happening.

"She starts and turns her head, Tinman, when she hears his step," he began. "Now she comes slowly towards him; they meet, and she is listening intently. Now she reads the note; in the politest way, my dear Tinman, he has lighted a match, and is shading it with his hands while she reads. I know you're praying hard, Tinman, that she may suspect, and refuse to go; I'm praying hard that she may be fool enough to believe, and to trust herself to Dawkins. I wonder which prayer will avail?"

I was indeed praying hard, but there was no hope in my heart that my prayer would be answered. He looked again out of the window, and laughed, and nodded at me.

"She has hesitated but for a moment," he said. "They move towards the gate; he opens it for her. She looks back at the house for a moment—see, I kiss my fingers to her, although she does not know it!—now they are passing out. The gate shuts. They are gone."

He left the window, and dropped into a chair, and burst into a shout of laughter. I crouched on the floor at his feet, with my arms bound behind me, and with my head bowed on my breast.

"I know your story, Tinman," he said at last, when his mirth had subsided a little; "Fanshawe told me something of it. You were a Quixote, I believe; you killed a man because he spoke ill of a woman, or would have done her harm. Look at you now!—a broken

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worn-out thing, with all your bombast and bravado gone; all your threats and your heroics mere words blown away by the wind. And if you were free—what would you not do?—what doughty deeds of heroism—eh? And behold, the excellent Dawkins is on his way to London, with a trusting girl for company; behold also—I shall follow very shortly. Bow your head, Tinman, for you are indeed a ghastly failure!"

After that for a time he busied himself about the room, casting a word at me now and then over his shoulder. I had got to my feet, and was sitting dejectedly enough on a chair, thinking miserably of what I had done; I no longer felt the discomfort of the gag or the ache in my shoulders; I was past physical suffering of any kind. After what seemed a long time, Olivant went across to the door and unlocked it; stood for a moment there, looking back at me contemptuously.

"You'll be safe here for a time, Tinman," he said. "A little later I'll come and release you. I'm sorry for your young friend, shivering in the wood and waiting hopelessly; but some one had to suffer. And when I see that other friend of yours—sweet little Barbara—in London, I'll exonerate you, and explain to her that it wasn't really your fault. Make yourself as comfortable as you can, Tinman, under disagreeable circumstances."

He took the key out of the lock, and transferred it to the outside of the door; then went away, locking me in. It did not seem to matter; I had failed hopelessly, and I did not mind what became of me. I had striven to do so much—had flung myself into this business with the ardour of a youth; but my youth was a thing of the past, and I was only a tired old man, easily beaten in an unequal struggle.

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I sat there for a long time, picturing horribly enough to myself all that might be happening to those in whom I was interested. I saw the boy waiting among the trees, and listening for every sound that floated to him —now certain that I was coming with the girl fast along the road to him—now blaming me bitterly because by carelessness or intentionally I had betrayed him. I saw the girl, too, in the hands of the scoundrel with whom she had so willingly set off on a journey that must end in disaster; and I ground my teeth on the gag that had been forced between them, in bitter despairing rage at the man who seemed to hold us all in the hollow of his hand.

Slowly the shame and degradation of the thing seemed to drop into my soul like a subtle poison. In a world that should be fair and bright—a world made for lovers—it was horrible and unnatural to think that such a creature as Murray Olivant should triumph over love and beauty and purity. Poor sorry knight that I was, for ever tilting at such monsters as himself, I had already been worsted once in the battle, and rendered, as it seemed, for ever useless; and now again, when I would be taking up the fight with fresh vigour, I had been flung at the first encounter, and my enemy triumphed. What a poor sorry spectacle I had made of myself, and how little good I had really done!

I began to have again that bitter rage in my heart that had been in it twenty years before, and had meant the death of a man. I found myself saying, over and over again, as I sat bound and helpless, that this man should die, no matter what the penalty might be—that I would wipe him off the face of the fair earth on which he crawled, and would leave the way clear for this new Barbara, and for the boy who had striven bravely to carry the flag I once had borne. Nothing

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could happen to me worse than had already happened; I felt in that hour almost as though God had brought me from my prison, and set me here to do this thing. And I had been chosen because no worse evil could befall me than I had already suffered; I had touched the depths, and could go no lower. Yes, I was a thing apart, and the way before me was as clear as it had been twenty years before.

I set to work systematically to free myself of my bonds. Getting to my feet, I stumbled stiffly towards the dressing-table in the room, and on the sharp edge at one corner of it began to saw the towel that held me, backwards and forward, until I had torn a hole in it. After that I worked franctically—up and down and across and across—until I felt it giving in places, and until I had torn a great jagged hole in it. It took a long time, but presently I was able to feel that the towel was gradually giving way; then at last, as I worked, I was suddenly flung forward, as the last strand started, and my hands fell to my sides. The rest was an easy matter, and I was presently able to get rid of my gag.

The door was locked, and I dared not break it down; I did not know whether Olivant was still in the house. I pulled back the curtain at the window, and looked out, after first extinguishing the light in the room. The room was on the first floor, and the drop to the ground not an alarming one; I crawled on to the broad window-ledge, and worked myself over it, gripping with my hands. After hanging there fof a moment I let go, and dropped, and fell without damage to the ground below.

At first I did not know what to do. On an impulse I was for setting out for the woods, there to find Arnold Millard, and acquaint him with what had happened. But in the very act of doing that I drew back, trembling; for I seemed to know what must inevitably happen

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then. Living, as I seemed to do, in the intimate thoughts and hopes and hatreds of the boy, I knew that what must happen would be an encounter between Murray Olivant and the younger man; and whatever punishment must be meted out to Olivant must, I felt, be left to me, and not to the boy. Before I stirred at all in the matter I must have time to think, and I must, above all, find out whether Murray Olivant was still in the house.

I could not, of course, get into the house again in the ordinary way; I must needs creep about the grounds, and watch. I went round to the terrace, and drew near enough to look in at the windows, and to see Lucas Savell sitting alone in the room, with his hands folded on his lap, and his head nodding to slumber. I tried gently to unfasten one of the long French windows, but in vain; and I was just turning away, when I saw him wake up, and shake his head, and blink his eyelids, and look about him. I saw him go to the door of the room, and apparently call out to some one in the house; then come back, closing the door after him. He made straight for the windows, and I was only just in time to draw back out of the way. After fumbling for a moment or two with the fastenings, he got the window open, and called out into the dark garden—

"Barbara! Barbara! What's become of you?"

There was no answer, and he stood for a moment fretfully muttering to himself. I was so close to him that I heard him say that no one ever attended to his wants, and that he was a poor neglected creature, and he wished that he was dead. While he stood there, the door of the room was opened, and Olivant came in.

"What are you bawling about?" I heard him ask.

Savell turned away from the window, leaving it open. "I want Barbara," he said peevishly. "She knows I want her at this time; there are lots of things

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she has to attend to that no one else can attend to. I'm actually left here—a poor invalid—with nothing to drink. It's a shame!"

"You're not likely to see your precious Barbara again—at all events for a long time," said Murray Olivant, leaning against a table, and looking at the other man. "So make up your mind to that."

"Eh?" Savell stared at him, with a frightened look on his face. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that the lady has taken matters into her own hands, and has run away with that scoundrelly half-brother of mine—young Millard," said Olivant slowly. "He's been hanging about here for a long time—before ever he came to dinner at all—and I've been afraid that something of this sort would happen. It's a pity; because I had a better fate in store for the girl, as you know."

"Yes—yes—of course I know that," said Savell feebly. "But can't they be stopped?—can't something be done?"

"I intend to do something — to-morrow," said Olivant. "It's too late to do anything to-night," he added, glancing at his watch. "Make your mind easy, my friend; I'll see that sweet Barbara comes to no harm. And if by any chance young Millard should come here, you'll understand that that's only a ruse on his part, to throw you off the scent. You'll very properly have him kicked out of the house."

I had been so intent upon what was happening in the room, and upon the words that passed between the two men, that I had been totally unaware of the fact that once again, as on another night I remembered, a shadow had detached itself from the shadows of the garden, and that what seemed to be a woman was leaning forward eagerly at the further end of the terrace, watching and listening. She had not seen

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me; she had crept forward step by step, and was staring into the lighted room. As Murray Olivant moved with a shiver towards the window as if to close it, she dropped back into the shadows, and was gone.

For a moment I stood there, staring after her, and vaguely calling to mind the fashion in which I had seen her before, and the white face I had seen looking into the room. Then, recovering myself, I started off quickly in pursuit—hearing her moving swiftly over the dead leaves on her way out of the grounds. Getting further away from the house, I ventured to call to her to stop; but she hastened on more quickly, breaking at last into a run, and finally disappearing among the trees. I ran on blindly, and just when I thought I had lost her stumbled against a figure standing quite still, and grasped it, and held to it. But this was not a woman; it was a man, who cried out feebly to me to let him go, and struggled in my grasp. It was Jervis Fanshawe.

"Some one ran past you—not a moment ago," I gasped. "A woman."

His face in the moonlight was ghastly white; I felt that he was trembling from head to foot. "Did *you* see it too?" he gasped, holding to me, and staring into my face.

I nodded. "Yes," I replied quickly. "Who was it?"

He shivered, and covered his face with his hands. "The dead come alive!" he whispered.

I thought at first that he had been scared by the hurried flight of the woman, or by my own calling to her in the darkness; above all, I was too anxious concerning what I had to do, and concerning the fugitive, to take much note of him. With an impatient exclamation I thrust him aside, and ran on quickly out of the

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grounds; but when I came to the road outside I saw that it lay like a grey streak under the light of the moon, and was empty. A little frightened and shaken, I determined then and there that there was but one thing to be done; I must find the boy, and must tell him what had happened in regard to Barbara.

But even as I started on that errand I heard footsteps behind me, and saw Fanshawe—a mere tottering shadow of a man—coming along the road after me, calling to me feebly to wait. But I ran on, taking no notice of him, and presently came to the end of the path that led into the wood. I dropped down there, calling to the boy softly as I went.

He stepped out to confront me at once, and I shall remember to my dying day the look upon his face when he saw that I was alone. He held to me for a moment in the silence of the wood; then shook me roughly, and flung me aside.

"Where is she?" he demanded, staring about him like one distracted.

"Gone!" I replied, clinging to him, in dreadful fear that he might break away from me when he heard the news, and make for the house. "Spirited away to London."

He stood quite still, with his hand pressed against his forehead, staring at me dreadfully while I went on to explain what had happened, and how I had been tricked. Then, with a laugh that was almost a sob, he broke away from me, and sprang for the road. I caught him as he went, and struggled with him.

"Where are you going?" I panted.

Even before he answered the question I heard the shuffling running footsteps of Jervis Fanshawe go past us on the road above; the man was still gaspingly calling my name. The footsteps died away, and I became aware that young Millard was speaking.

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"I'm going to find Murray Olivant," said the boy between his teeth. "Let me go!"

"You're too late," I lied to him. "He's gone too." For I knew that at that time it would have been madness to let him go to the house in search of his brother.

He suddenly turned from me, with all the courage gone out of him as it seemed, and broke down utterly. He leant his arm against a tree, and his head on his arm, and wept as though his heart would break; I trembled to see how the great sobs shook and rent him. I stood wringing my hands, and pleading with him in whispers to be calm, even while at the same time I was so shaken myself that I could scarcely get out the words. When presently that fit of despair had passed, he spoke to me like a man suddenly grown old.

"I shall go to London to find her," he said slowly. "If he has harmed her, then by the mother that bore us both I'll kill him. Life can be nothing to me then, and I shall not mind what happens. Look at that hand, Tinman"—he stretched it out before him, and I saw that it was still and steady as a rock—"and take note that I do not speak in any boyish anger. If he has harmed her, it will be worse than if he had killed her, for he will have killed her soul; it'll be a small vengeance to kill his body. Don't try to stop me; I shall know where to find him in London."

He sprang out on to the road, and set off at a great pace towards the town. For a few moments I strove to keep up with him, trotting by his side, and pleading brokenly with him that he would at least take time to think. But he paid no heed to anything I said; he walked straight on, staring in front of him with that set deadly look in his eyes. And after a time I was compelled from sheer exhaustion to drop behind, and to see him go on steadily before me until he was lost to sight.

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I walked on feebly for a little time, perhaps with some faint hope that he might repent of his purpose, and turn back. Presently on the road before me I saw a man standing, and for a moment the wild hope sprang up in my mind that this was Arnold Millard, already hesitating; as I ran up to him, however, I saw that it was Fanshawe, who had evidently run himself to a standstill. He was muttering to himself like one possessed, laughing and trembling, and standing still to look about him and to listen. As I went up to him he took me by the arm, and spoke again those mad words he had used in the grounds of the house.

"The dead come alive, Charlie," he whispered. "As I hope for Heaven, I saw the face—there—going past me like a face in a dream. I saw her, I tell you."

"Who?" I asked, with my mind full of something else.

"Barbara," he whispered. "Not the child—but *your* Barbara—*my* Barbara! She went past me like a spirit!"

Horrified at the mere thought, I clapped my hand upon his lips, and looked about me fearfully; for all at once it seemed almost possible that on that night of disaster the spirit of the dead woman might have come back, in the vain hope to save her child. I shuddered in the wintry wind that swept about us both on the deserted road; I peered into the shadows, awed and afraid.

"Fool!" I muttered savagely, to hide my own fears. "You don't know what you're talking about. It's the new Barbara—the child—about which we're concerned to-night. She's gone."

"And the old Barbara come back," he said; and stood there shuddering, with his face hidden in his hands.

I left him, and went back towards the house. It

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seemed as though I was shaken to my very soul, as though something mysterious and wonderful was in the very air itself, threatening me. I pushed open the gate leading into the grounds, and peered in, like a little child afraid of the dark; then I went in, picking my way cautiously through the ruined and neglected garden, with my eyes fixed upon the terrace. Coming to it, I crept among the shadows, and peered in.

Murray Olivant was no longer there; but in his usual chair, with the decanter and a glass beside him, sat Lucas Savell in the lighted room in a heavy slumber. And once again from that opposite end of the terrace I saw the shadowy woman creep forward, and look into the room. With my very hair rising, as it seemed, and my limbs trembling, I took a step towards her, and called her name—

"Barbara!"

After a moment she came slowly towards me, and by the light that came from the room I looked into her eyes. Then with a great cry I fell at her feet, feeling that I held in mine warm hands of flesh and blood.

"Barbara!"

"I've come back—my dear—my dear—to save my child," said the voice of the Barbara I had loved and lost twenty years before.

Inside the lighted room the man whose name she bore started, and shook himself, and fell asleep again; outside in the cold and the darkness I knelt at the feet of the woman I loved, and bowed my face upon her hands, as I had done twenty years before in the same spot.

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CHAPTER VII

NEWS OF THE PRISONER

IN some unreal dream, as it seemed, I presently found myself walking through the ruined garden in the darkness, with that shadowy figure of the woman I had loved beside me. It was a shadowy figure then, because there seemed to be nothing tangible about her; I should scarcely have been surprised if she had suddenly melted again into the shadows of the garden, and been lost to me. I found myself, broken trembling creature that I was, walking beside her fearfully, and seizing an opportunity now and then to touch her dress or her hand, to be sure that I was not dreaming. And presently it happened, happily and naturally enough, that we walked out of the place under the winter moonlight hand in hand.

I would not have you laugh at us; I would not have you think that we were old. True, I was old, in the sense that I was broken and forlorn and poor, with no one in the world to cling to, except this dear woman who had so mysteriously come back to me. So intangible had been my dreams of her at all times, that there was less of a shock to me in finding her grown older than I should have thought possible. I had pictured her always, first as being of the age I had known her as a girl, and later as having died young, and never having grown to womanhood at all. But now, as she walked beside me, I found, when I had the

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courage to steal a glance at her now and then, that she had the eyes of the Barbara of old, and that the face, though changed and strengthened, was only the face of the Barbara I had loved in all its lines and in all its maturer beauty. It seemed fitting, too, that we should meet like this, with the night and the silence to ourselves; fitting that we should turn naturally towards that wood in which we had met, and presently sit down there, side by side, on a fallen tree to talk. Such poor forlorn lovers we were, that I remember regretting I had no overcoat that I could put about her; and she laughing, in the way I remembered so well, and telling me that it did not matter.

My head was bare after my escape from the house by the window; I remember that she touched my grey hair softly with her hand for a moment before she began to speak.

"My dear, I came first to the prison on the day that I knew you were to be released; I had seen it mentioned in a newspaper. But I was too late; you had already gone. And I had waited so many years, in the hope that I might take your hand, and be the first to give you welcome back to the world."

"But they told me you were dead," I whispered. "They said you had—had died at sea."

"When I came to you for the last time, in that dreadful place where they were to kill you the next day, I strove hard to keep your brave words clearly before me, and to do what you had begged me to do. It was as though you had died young, and so had ended the poor broken story of our loves; so at least I told myself. I would not have you think, my dear, that I was callous; but you had lain down your life, and I could serve you best, and serve your memory best, by taking up mine as you would have had me live it. So I went away with my husband out into

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the world, and I strove hard to set aside all my memories, and all my hopes, and all my wishes; I was as a numbed thing, existing only, and striving to forget."

I looked into her eyes, and I held her hands; and it seemed as though the broken useless years dropped away from me, and that I sat there that night, cleansed and purified; I would not have changed places with any one in all the world. I had not a coin in my pocket, nor a friend in the world save this woman as forlorn as myself; but I would not have changed places with any man living that night.

"I heard, of course, that you were reprieved," she went on; "and although I was glad to feel that you still lived, it hurt me most to think that you, who loved the sun and the free air and the woods, were condemned to that death in life. But I strove always to keep my promise to you, and long after my child was born I lived with my husband, and took up my dull round of daily tasks. But by degrees a change came over Lucas Savell; he grew morose and distrustful, and only long afterwards did I understand what had changed him.

"What was it?" I asked.

"When my father prosecuted your guardian, Jervis Fanshawe, I think he heard something about the poor innocent love story that had been ours. I think Fanshawe poisoned his mind, and I believe my father breathed something of his suspicions to Lucas Savell. From that time he began to treat me badly, with little petty acts of tyranny at first, and then with open slights and small degradations, until at last my health broke down. I think he became a little frightened, and at the urgent request of the doctors he took me away on a sea voyage with the child."

"But from that sea voyage you never returned," I reminded her.

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"My dear, be patient, and listen," she urged gently. "On that long voyage it seemed to me that life, as I had once hoped to lived it, came back to me; in the long watches of the night, when I could not sleep, I thought of you in your prison, and my life seemed a thing shameful and horrible. I remembered your gentleness; even in the prison garb in which I sometimes thought of you, you stood before me always as a king—strong and self-sacrificing and wonderful. Because a man had dared to speak ill of me, you had gone out, without a thought of the consequences, and struck him dead; there was no man I'd ever met who would have done half so much for me."

I thought of a boy who was even then setting out to do the same thing again; I shuddered as I sat there.

"At last one night the thing had become intolerable to me," she went on, in a whisper that grew sharp and eager as she remembered that time. "I made up my mind that I could no longer live the life I was living; I must get away somewhere, and hide myself; I must, if possible, begin again. It seemed to me, my dear, as though your sacrifice had been in vain; I must consecrate what was left of my life to you, and to the memory of you. We were in mid-ocean—but I made up my mind to escape."

"How did you do it?" I asked.

"There was a stewardess on board—a strong, stern, repressed woman, whose confidence I had gained, and who seemed to be deeply interested in me. I told her just so much of my story as was necessary; I swore to her that I could not and would not meet the man whose name I bore again. I told her that I would, if necessary, fling myself into the sea rather than endure his presence any longer. And she showed me a better and a simpler way, yet a harder way to bear."

She sat for a moment or two with her elbows on her

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knees, leaning forward, and evidently thinking deeply; I did not dare to interrupt her. I stole a hand into hers, and she clasped my hand between her own, and so held it while she went on talking.

"At her suggestion I left a note for my husband, telling him that I was tired of my life, and that I meant to end it; I implored him to be good to the child. I left the note in our cabin, and I stole out, when all the ship except those on watch above was asleep, and met my friend the stewardess. She took charge of me; and she locked me into a tiny second-class cabin that had before been empty. And for the remainder of that voyage she tended me, and brought me food, and kept me hidden."

"And your husband—Lucas Savell? What of him?" I asked.

"After the first shock I do not think he cared very much," she replied. "We had lived very unhappily; perhaps he saw in this a release. I was told by the stewardess that the ship was searched; but she managed to put them off the scent, as far as my hiding-place was concerned—smuggled me into her own quarters while the search was going on. When we reached the end of the voyage she lent me clothes and a heavy veil, and I walked out unnoticed among the crowd of passengers and the other crowd that had come to meet them. I landed in England a free woman, and I began again, under another name."

"And what was that other name?" I asked.

She laughed softly, and coloured like a girl. "Barbara Avaline," she replied. Then more quickly she added: "I would not have you think that I took that name merely for a whim; it was because I loved you, and because I felt that in spirit at least I belonged to you. I have lived quietly, and not unhappily; I had my memories to sustain me. The hardest part had

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been, of course, the giving up of little Barbara; I almost failed in my purpose once or twice—almost went back to Savell for the sake of the child. But, thank God, I was able in all those long years to get news of her; I have been near her many and many a time—poor unhappy mother that I was!—and have known that she was well. I have had to work for my living, but that has not mattered; I might have gone mad if I had not had something to do."

"And what first brought you down here?" I asked after a pause, during which it seemed as though we sat together looking into the past.

"My father had left the business to Lucas Savell, but it was never any good in his hands. It went down and down, and I knew that Savell was borrowing money anywhere and everywhere. After a time they got quite poor—Barbara and her father—and I began to see a number of people gathering about the place, just as they say birds of prey gather when a man is dying and his hours are numbered. I did not think of Savell; I thought only of Barbara and of what might happen to her. And so, in a poor futile way, I've haunted this place, and watched her—even hungered for her more than I dare say."

"Where are you living?" I asked her.

"I have a couple of rooms at a cottage on the outskirts of the town," she said, "and I do needlework for a living. I lie hidden all day, and only come out like this when the darkness has fallen. And to think that I have seen you here before, and did not guess who you were.

"I am so changed," I reminded her sadly.

"I might have known that you would steal back to the place where for an hour or two we were happy; I might have guessed that. I have seen you once or twice about the house and the grounds, and wondered a little who you were, and why I was so strongly moved

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at the sight of you. But we must not think any more of ourselves," she went on eagerly—"we must think of those who have grown up to take our places."

"They have grown up to take our places indeed," I said. "The new Barbara rises up in your image, to find herself hopelessly in love with a boy who may be something like myself twenty years ago; like myself, the boy has no chance, from a worldly point of view. Some strange fate has cast us up here together, like ghosts out of the past, and it is for us to help them. That will be beautiful, Barbara, because in doing that we may mend that broken love story that was our own."

"I have thought of that, too," she replied. We had risen to our feet, and she was looking at me earnestly. "I saw Barbara go away to-night with a strange man: I was watching in the garden. She went reluctantly; I heard her question him as to whether he was sure of this and that. Tell me what it meant."

"Danger for her—ruin for her, unless she can be found," I replied. Then I told her rapidly of all that had happened that night, and of the plot that was afoot. She listened eagerly, questioning me on this detail and on that, speaking especially about the boy, and what attitude he would take in the business.

"Don't you see, Barbara," I exclaimed in a whisper—"don't you understand that he sets his feet to-night absolutely in the footmarks that were mine twenty years ago?"

"What do you mean?" she asked quickly, catching at my arm.

"Barbara, I set out twenty years ago to make a man eat his words, or to kill the lie that he had told about you. To-night this boy sets out on the same errand, with a new Barbara—your child—to inspire him. She

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is to him as pure and precious a thing as you were to me all those years ago. If he finds the man, he will strike him down, as I struck down Gavin Hockley; he will suffer as I suffered—although they may be more merciful in his case, and may take his life. Think of it!" I cried, wringing my hands as I stood there, bareheaded, trembling and helpless in the winter night—"think of it! I can do nothing, because I have no money and no strength left; you can do nothing, because you died to the world years ago, and at the best, even though you lived, you are poor and helpless as I am. While we stand here—two poor ghosts come back out of the world that is dead—this boy and girl take up the tale, and rush straight to disaster, just as we did."

"But we have come back to save her," she exclaimed quickly. "This is no time for despair, Charlie; we have a greater power given to us than you imagine. We shall work in secret—you and I—and we shall succeed. See now"—she held my hands, and looked into my eyes, and smiled encouragingly—"you are calmer already than you have been. It seems to me that the best thing we can do is to get to London at the earliest possible moment. Barbara has been taken there—the boy has gone there; this man Murray Olivant will inevitably follow. You know where he is to be found, and we may be able to trace the boy. There is nothing to be frightened of yet, Charlie; we will fight together, because we understand so much more than these other people do."

She was so wise and calm that she seemed to give me wisdom too. I presently found myself walking beside her back towards the town; it was her intention to shelter me for the night at that tiny cottage where she lived near Hammerstone Market. She had a key to the place, and we crept in silently; she gave me some poor food she had there, and insisted that I should

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stretch my weary limbs on an old couch in the sitting-room for the remainder of the night.

I slept heavily, and long before dawn, as it seemed, I found her standing beside me, gently waking me. She had prepared some steaming hot coffee, and I drank it gratefully, while she sat beside me and told me what I was to do.

"This man Murray Olivant still feels that you may be useful to him," she said; "in any case, you know too much about his plans to be lightly thrown aside. I have money here that will take you to London; you will go to those rooms where Fanshawe first took you, and you will wait there for Olivant. Do you understand?"

I said that I did, and that I would do all she suggested.

"Two things you have to remember," went on the calm voice. "The first, that the boy must be prevented, at the present time at least, from meeting Olivant; I shudder to think what might happen if they met now. Persuade Olivant to get away—to hide—anything. The second is to get hold of poor Barbara, and to bring her back to her father, if by any chance we do not find young Millard. It may happen that, if Olivant is frightened of what may befall him if the boy finds him, he may throw up the game, and get out of the way; then our course is clear. But in any case, Charlie, we must not travel together. You will go first, and I will come afterwards; we can arrange some place in which to meet in London."

She knew as little about London as I did; therefore she chose the first public place she could think of for our later meeting. I was to find her on one of the seats on the north side of Trafalgar Square, just under the terrace; it was the only place we could think of in the hurry of the moment.

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I found that she had thought of everything; she had even bought an old discarded brown wideawake hat from her landlady for me, and had found out at what time the earliest train started for London. With a little money in my pocket I set off eagerly enough on my mission. I felt more hopeful than I had for many days past; I somehow felt that together we must succeed.

It was cold and raw, and there was a biting wind. There were but few people on the platform, and those for the most part were market folk going to intervening stations. I looked eagerly about, wondering if by any chance Murray Olivant had made up his mind to travel so early as that; but I saw nothing of him. Evidently he was so sure of the plans he had laid that he was not going to trouble himself to turn out on such a bitter morning, or to hurry to London.

I went straight to his rooms on reaching London, only to be told by the manservant that he was not there, and was not expected; indeed, the man seemed somewhat astonished at seeing me at all. I evaded his questions, and came away; turned back to deliver a message to the effect that if Mr. Murray Olivant came to the place, the man would beg him to stay until I came again; I had news for him of vital importance. Then I went away, and roamed the streets in the bitter weather, pursued and haunted by a thousand doubts and fears. And so back again to the rooms of Murray Olivant—to see the boy Arnold Millard pacing up and down outside, and keeping watch upon them.

I seemed to see myself again, twenty years before, raging up and down the pavement of Lincoln's Inn Fields, waiting for the man I was to kill!

I was afraid to go to him, or to let him know that

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I was there, because I feared lest he might think I was on the side of the enemy, fighting against him and the girl. And yet I was afraid, too, that Murray Olivant might at any moment come swinging into the street, and find himself face to face with the boy who had sworn to kill him. Keeping that borrowed hat well down over my brows, I set about to find Olivant, guessing pretty well which way he would come. I went to the end of the street, and presently saw a cab driving fast in the direction of Olivant's rooms; in the cab was the man I sought.

I ran along beside it, and called to Olivant excitedly. He threw up the trap in the roof, and told the man to stop; leaned out over the apron to speak to me.

"Hullo, friend Tinman," he said genially, "where have you sprung from? And who let you loose from the house?"

"There's danger—great danger," I panted, standing on the step of the cab and whispering to him. "Everything has come out; young Mr. Millard is waiting there up the street—has been waiting there for hours."

"Well—what of it?" he asked; but I thought his face went suddenly pale.

"He swears that he will kill you, and he means to do it," I said.

Something of my own excitement seemed to communicate itself to Olivant; he became suddenly serious. Thrusting open the doors of the cab, he caught up the bag that was beside him on the seat, and got out. He paid the cabman, and then handed me the bag. "Come along," he said quickly; "there's another way into the place down this side street. We can't stand talking here."

So we gained his rooms in that secret fashion; and the moment we entered the manservant began to explain to him that Mr. Arnold Millard had called,

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and would call again. Olivant cut him short quickly. "There—that'll do; I know all about it," he said. "Understand that no one is to be admitted; I have not yet returned from the country. Any one who comes can leave a message."

He seemed curiously perturbed, I thought; he did not even refer at first to my own escape, or to the fact of my being in London so strangely. He went to a window, and pulled aside a curtain, and looked out; turned away with an exclamation, and looked at me. "How long has he been there?" he demanded.

"As I have told you—some hours," I said.

He went to the sideboard, and poured some neat spirits into a glass, and drained it. Then he came back to me, and, after a moment's hesitation, began to question me.

"Now, in the first place, how did he connect me with the business?"

"I told him," I replied simply. "I had to tell him—I meant to tell him, for the sake of the girl."

"Well, Mr. Facing-Both-Ways, then what brings you here? You tell the boy where to find me, and then come skulking with your tail between your legs to warn me. I don't understand it."

"I wanted to save the girl," I answered fearlessly. "Don't you understand that he was to wait in a certain place, until I came to him, bringing the girl; he would have waited there for a time, and then have come to the house to find me? And don't you understand," I cried passionately, "that I'm not fighting for you now, but for him?"

He turned to me quickly; looked at me curiously. "Fighting for him?"

In the tense stillness of the room, as we looked into each other's eyes, it almost seemed to me that

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I could hear the echoing footsteps of the boy pacing up and down outside—waiting, with murder in his heart. My own heart was beating madly; I could scarcely get out the words I uttered.

"Yes—fighting for him," I whispered—"won't you understand that? Twenty years ago a man like you wronged a woman with his tongue, and died because of that wrong. A boy—just such another as the boy who walks up and down outside there now—struck him dead, and stood under the gallows for his crime. I was that boy; and he who waits below is but myself, come back to life to do what I did. I am not fighting for you—you are nothing; I am here to-night to save the boy from my fate. For as there is a God above us, he is here to kill you!"

He looked at me steadily for a moment or two, and then turned away. I saw him pull his handkerchief from the sleeve of his coat, and pass it once across his forehead, and then rub his hands with it hard, as though they were wet. Then, in the most matter-of-fact way, he came back to me, and looked at me steadily. His eyes were very bright—brighter and darker in contrast with the pallor of his face.

"You're not lying to me?" he demanded, in a whisper.

"I am not lying."

"And I suppose it doesn't happen by chance that you and this brother of mine are in league—and that you are to terrorize me, and find out about the girl—eh?"

"Don't you think in that case he would have come to you and made his threat in person?" I asked quickly.

"Yes, I suppose he would," he admitted. "In any case, I have to thank you for this; if you'd

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have held your tongue, he might have thought that the girl had run away, or that she wanted nothing more to do with him; he might never have connected me with the matter at all. And now, having caught me here like a rat in a trap, I suppose you think you can force me to do something, out of fear? Well, you won't do that; because in this unequal world it's the rich man that always scores in the long run. That poor beggar cooling his heels on the pavement outside may threaten as he likes; I am safe enough. But I wish I'd tied you up a little more securely, my friend," he added viciously.

"You can get out of this difficulty in a moment," I reminded him. "Say where the girl is, and produce her to this boy unharmed, and you are safe."

"No!" he exclaimed violently. "I'll not be threatened by him—I'll not be forced to do anything against my will. I can snap my fingers at him. Besides," he added with a grin, "there's another reason. I don't myself know where the girl is."

"But you sent her away with the man Dawkins," I exclaimed quickly.

"Who was to bring her to London, and to let me know where she was. And I haven't heard yet."

Even as he spoke I heard a sharp double knock at the outer door. I think for a moment Olivant imagined that this was but a ruse on the part of the boy to get in; I saw him move quickly to the further end of the room. But a moment later the manservant came in with a small salver on which lay a letter. Olivant, with almost a sigh of relief, picked it up and turned it over.

"Talk of the devil," he muttered with a laugh, and tore it open.

He seemed to read the thing through twice; and as he read his face grew harder and harder. Finally

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he turned to me, and spoke quietly, with something of the air of a man who is driven into a corner, but has set his back against the wall, and means to fight.

"This is from friend Dawkins," he said. "He tells me that he has brought the girl to London, and has put her in safe hands; he thinks, however, that he should have something for his trouble." He broke off, and turned to the letter. "'I am not a rich man,'" he read, "'and a small matter of five hundred pounds would be extremely useful to me just now. Didn't I mention this last night? Under the circumstances, and for the sake of the young lady, I think it better that you should know that I want this sum in exchange for her address. She's a dear girl, and quite worth it.'" He banged the letter savagely with his fist, and began to pace about the room, muttering to himself. "First one and then another—this threat and that; what do you all think I'm made of? So this dog thinks he'll hold the girl to ransom, does he? Sends me an address to which letters are to be forwarded." He suddenly strode to the door, and opened it.

"What are you going to do?" I asked quickly.

"I'm going out to face them—this fellow who threatens my life, and this other who threatens my pocket. I won't skulk like a dog here, and let them think I'm afraid of them."

I caught his arm, and strove to draw him back into the room. "Don't do that!" I pleaded—"don't do that!"

He came back into the room, and closed the door; suddenly he began to laugh in a grim fashion, as though he rather enjoyed the situation. "If I had anybody in whom I could put any confidence," he said, "I'd cheat them both yet. But you're not

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fighting for me—and you may be against me. If Fanshawe were here, I might be able to do something; Fanshawe's got a sort of deadly hatred of this girl that would carry him to any lengths. I wonder what is best to be done?"

Whatever he decided to do then he kept to himself; after pacing about the room for a time he told me I could go, and that if I came back to him on the following day he might have news for me. His last words to me as I left him were characteristic of the man.

"I'll beat you all yet—and I'll win my game!" he said.

In the grey of a winter twilight I found Barbara Savell—that older Barbara who had belonged to my life—pacing about at the north side of Trafalgar Square. We met—she full of eagerness and anxiety, I dejectedly enough. I told her that I had failed, but that I had hopes that I might yet find that other Barbara. She told me that she had secured a little lodging in a humble quarter, and told me where it was; I walked with her to it, and left her there for the night. Then, because I did not know what else to do, I went off to that place in which I had stayed before with Jervis Fanshawe—that shabby room in a shabby house near the river. I was worn out and miserable when I knocked at the door, and was admitted by the girl Moggs.

"'Ullo!" she exclaimed, her face expanding in a grin—"so you've come back, 'ave yer? The other party 'asn't bin 'ere fer days an' days; but I fink 'e's expected."

"Why do you think that?" I asked carelessly.

"'Cos there's some one waitin' for 'im—pleasant sort o' gent, wiv a smile that does yer 'eart good to see. Real genel'man, mind you," she added, with a confident nod.

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"Has he told you his name?" I asked, in a whisper.

"Yus. Name o' Dawkins," she replied.

I went scrambling and stumbling up the stairs; behind me as I ran I heard the girl Moggs calling to me, but I paid no heed.

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CHAPTER VIII

I ASSIST THE ENEMY

AS I came to the door of that shabby room in which I knew the man Dawkins was, a great trembling fell upon me, so that I hesitated, and was afraid to go in. It was not fear for myself: I think at that time I had no fear of anything; it was only that I knew that I should not be able to control myself, if I stood face to face with this creature who had assisted Murray Olivant to secure the girl, and now held her to be sold for a price. I stopped outside the door, with my hands clenched, and with my heart beating wildly.

The tumult of passion in me was stilled by the girl, who had run hard after me up the stairs. I felt her coarsened grubby little hand gripping mine; slowly she drew me back away from the door.

"'Ere—pull yerself togevver," she whispered. "Wot's wrong wiv yer?"

"If I go into that room I am afraid of what I may do," I said, clutching at the girl, and staring at the closed door. "I'm afraid of myself."

"Wot's 'e done?" she whispered excitedly.

"Nothing you'd understand," I said. "But oh, Moggs—have you ever read or heard anywhere any fairy tale, concerning some wonderful princess, shut away in prison and left to pine, while her lover waited in vain for her. Have you, Moggs?"

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She nodded quickly, and her face expanded into a grin. "Yus—I did once," she whispered. "It came 'ere with summink wrapped in it—bit of a Christmas story, it was."

"There's a wonderful princess held prisoner by that man," I whispered eagerly. "And he'll smile—and smile—and I am powerless to do anything to help. You wise little person—tell me what to do?"

She plunged her grubby hands into her hair, and wrinkled up her face in thought; then she caught at my hand again, and whispered a startling suggestion. "Go in an' talk to 'im," she said, "an' keep yer dander down. W'en 'e goes out presently, I'll foller 'im—an' if I don't come back knowin' w'ere she is, my name ain't Moggs. Is she a real tiptopper?"

"Beautiful, and gentle, and good," I assured her, as she listened unctuously.

"An' 'im wot's sweet on 'er—is 'e all right?"

"The best fellow in the world," I replied.

"Then this is just w'ere I come in!" exclaimed the strange little creature. "I was born for this 'ere!"

I shook hands with her solemnly on the dark and grimy staircase; and I blessed and thanked her. Then I opened the door, and went into the room, praying hard for strength to control myself. Dawkins was sitting on the edge of the table, swinging one leg, and smoking a cigar; he did not trouble to look round as I entered, probably from the fact that he felt that only one person could come into that room with any assurance.

"Well, Fanshawe, it's taken you long enough to get to London," he said, flicking the ash from his cigar.

"I beg your pardon," I said, "but it's not Mr. Fanshawe."

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He jumped off the table, and leant against it, staring at me; I think it was the first time I had seen his face without a smile upon it. "By George!" he exclaimed, in a low voice—"I thought I'd tied you up better than that!"

"I was so fortunate as to get away," I replied. "I have seen my—my master, Mr. Olivant; he knows all about my escape. I have just left him."

"Then perhaps you've brought something for me from him?" he exclaimed eagerly, with his habitual smile breaking over his face.

I shook my head. "Nothing," I said. "I did not expect even to find you here."

"True; I'd forgotten that," he said, in a tone of disappointment. "I suppose you came looking for Fanshawe—eh? As a matter of fact, I want to see Fanshawe myself."

I suddenly made up my mind that I would make the attempt on my own part to find out something about the girl; I might even be able to persuade this man that he would get nothing from Murray Olivant, and so induce him, out of revenge, to let me know where Barbara was. After a moment's hesitation I plunged into the business.

"When you left me tied up and gagged at the house at Hammerstone Market," I began, "you took away with you a young lady—Miss Barbara Savell."

"And a deuced nice girl, too," exclaimed the man, nodding his head and smiling. "You were nicely diddled over that business, Tinman; and in turn I diddled our friend Olivant. It's a pity that so charming a young lady should be played catch-ball with in this fashion; but that's her fault, because she *is* so charming. Now, I suppose you've really been sent by Olivant to spy out the land—eh? You may

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as well let me know the truth, because I shall discover it in any case. I'm much too wily for you people."

"I tell you again that I did not imagine for a moment you would be here," I reminded him. "Mr. Olivant knows nothing of your whereabouts; he has simply had your letter, giving an address to which letters may be sent. But I assure you that you will get nothing out of him."

"Oh, so you know *that*, do you?" he said with a sneer. "Very well, I can afford to wait. The young lady, though inclined to be troublesome and fretful, is really very charming company."

"I want to believe, sir, that you're a gentleman," I went on again patiently.

"Thank you," he responded, smiling.

"And I want to appeal to your better nature. This girl is friendless in the world, save for me and for the boy who loves her; you have been fortunate enough and wise enough to get her out of the hands of Murray Olivant; give her into mine, and let me send her back to her lover—or to her father."

Even as I made the appeal I realized the futility of it. But I saw here that violence would not do, and that he would scoff at any threatening; I had felt at first, when I began to speak, that there was a faint chance that I might move the man. As he laughed and shook his head, I saw that I must, after all, trust to that frail support—Moggs.

"My good man, it is quite refreshing to hear any one talk as you do," he said. "You really appear to be in earnest, and under other circumstances I might almost be prepared to listen to you. But the prize is too good to be lost, whether I get the money or stick to the lady. Personally, I believe that Olivant may be squeezed, and may decide that it is best for

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him to pay; but in any case I score. No, friend Tinman, this is not a game with which you are concerned. Mind your own business, and leave these things to your betters. And as it seems that Fanshawe is not coming, I think I'll return to the lady."

"And if I follow you?" I exclaimed, maddened at the thought that he set me aside so lightly. "What then?"

He struck a match, and relit his cigar; looking at me over the smoke of it, he laughed, and shook his head. "You're really very simple, Tinman," he said. "I don't believe for a moment that you really take so deep an interest in the lady and her lover; I am inclined to believe that you are a spy from the camp of Mr. Murray Olivant. If you have the audacity to follow me, I shall do one of two things: I shall either go in a wrong direction, at some inconvenience to myself; or I shall call the attention of the first constable I meet to you, and inform him that you have been begging from me, and threatening me. You look shabby, Tinman, and you have a bad record behind you, I understand. For your own sake you'd better stay here."

At that time I had no very great faith in the powers of Moggs; however eager she might be to throw herself into the business, I felt that in all probability this astute man of the world would prove more than a match for her. It was with something very like despair in my heart that I saw him saunter out of the room. I ventured to the door the moment after he had left the room, and opened it cautiously; he was going down the stairs, and he stopped for a moment to look back at me.

"You can tell Fanshawe that it doesn't matter, after all; I'm not particularly anxious to see him. And if you want the lady, Tinman—well—your master

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Murray Olivant knows how to get her. Good-night to you!"

I saw nothing of Moggs; I went back into the room, and shut the door. It seemed at that time as though all I had striven to do and all I had hoped for had been brought to naught; I stood helpless in this poor shabby room, staring about me, and wondering what I should do. What power did I possess—poor broken outcast, without even a name, and assisted only by a little drab of the streets; what could we do against such men as Olivant? I recognized, now that it was too late, that I ought to have played a different game; that I should have matched cunning with cunning, and devilry with devilry; I had been too blunt and outspoken. And then my thoughts flew back to the boy, waiting doggedly outside the rooms of the man who had set out to ruin him and the girl he loved; and I saw the Fate that had dogged and destroyed me marching grimly on over me, and striking down young Arnold Millard. I had no power to stay his hand; nor was there any power behind such threats as I might use to Olivant and the others.

I was like a man who stands in the dark, with three or four roads stretching out from the point at which he is, and uncertain in his own mind which to take. I had thoughts of going to my Barbara, and making her understand more completely even than she understood yet the peril in which her child stood; but, on the other hand, I knew that to do that would be useless while the girl was still lost to us. Then I thought of sending to Lucas Savell; but remembered what manner of man he was, and how utterly useless he would be in a crisis. It seemed monstrous that I should stand here, helpless, in the midst of a great city—unable to do anything; but I had to remember,

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bitterly enough, that I was a man with the brand of Cain upon me, and a long prison record behind me; more than that, I was known in London and elsewhere as living under another name. It was all a horrible tangle, from which it seemed impossible that we should ever escape.

I heard a step upon the stairs—too heavy to be that of Moggs; it was a jaded weary step, and it stopped outside the door. I went to the door, and opened it; outside a man stood, and as he thrust me aside and came in I saw that it was Jervis Fanshawe. He threw down a small untidy bundle on to the bed, and tossed his hat after it, and sank into a chair.

"Give me something to drink," he said hoarsely.

I found something, and gave it to him; he drank it greedily, looking at me as he did so with a curious expression in his eyes. Once he made up his mind to speak; but he stopped, even as he opened his lips, and half rose in his chair, staring hard at the door. He did not look at me; his voice was a mere shaking whisper.

"There's some one on the stairs!" Then, as I moved quickly to the door, he sprang up and confronted me, and pressed me back; and his face was like death itself. "No—no—don't open the door. I know what it is, and I couldn't bear to see it again."

"Why, what do you mean?" I faltered. "What have you seen; what's happened to you?"

He did not reply; with a trembling hand he poured out some more of the liquor, and drank it; and even then, as he did so, he paused to listen again with that curious intentness. Finally he got over to the further end of the room, and then pointed to the door, and whispered—

"Open it now, Charlie—quick!"

I confess I was as much shaken as he seemed to

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be; I pulled open the door, however, and looked out. There was no one there, and I told him so as I closed it again.

"Last night in the garden—while you ran and called to something or some one—I saw her," he said in a whisper. "I told you then it was the dead come alive; I tell you so again now, Charlie. To-night in London, as I tramped through the streets (and I swear I was not thinking of her in any way), I saw her face pass me again—it was as though there was some strange light upon it, that never was on this earth. Before God, Charlie, she's come back; as I live, she means to haunt me and to follow me!"

I saw in a moment what had happened. The face of that elder Barbara, as he had seen it for a moment, had been to him the face of the woman he believed to be dead; his further meeting her in London had been a mere accident. I hesitated to tell him the truth: that this woman was alive. I did not know how much further I might be complicating matters, or what greater difficulties I might be creating. For the present, at least, I determined to hold my tongue, and to let him think what he would. He went on with his rambling talk.

"I've heard of men being driven mad like that," he said; "I've heard that some one, deeply wronged, may come back from the grave, to work a more bitter vengeance than they could have done in life. Is there any truth in that, Charlie?"

I began to see that this better mood might be useful; that this implacable creature, who had pursued his vengeance so relentlessly and so long, might perhaps be turned a little from his purpose if he supposed that the spirit of the dead woman was following him, to take account of what he was doing. His next words confirmed that impression in my mind.

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"I helped Olivant and Dawkins last night and yesterday over that matter of the girl; spied out the land for them, and told them where you were, and what you were doing. I meant all along to drag the girl down, as I meant years ago to drag down the mother: she had her mother's look, and her mother's voice, and I hated her for them. But I'm afraid, Charlie; I find myself starting at shadows. You saw her last night in the garden; I heard you call to her."

"Yes, I saw her," I replied steadily.

He drew a long breath, and looked again at the door with that hunted look his face had worn before. "I knew it; that proves it," he said. "I'm getting an old man, Charlie, and all my vengeance has brought me nothing but this: that I sit in this place, with no soul on God's earth to speak a good word for me, and with the knowledge that I may have wrecked the lives of two women. There's hell for me, Charlie, and that dead woman will fling me down to it!"

It was in my mind then, in sheer pity for the hunted wretch, to tell him the truth. But I saw in a moment that if I did that he would understand that he had been robbed of his vengeance from the very start, and had brought himself to his present pass for nothing; for the woman he had pursued was living still. I understood that in that case I should make him a more bitter enemy to the mother and the girl than ever, out of sheer rage at having been duped so long. And in any case I had seen enough of him to know that I could not trust him. And out of his fright some good might come.

That fright was indeed so great that when, a moment later, a hand was laid upon the door, and it opened cautiously, the man started up, with something very like a shriek. But it was nothing more than Moggs,

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untidy and slipshod as ever; she gave me a quick glance as she came in, and my heart gave a leap, for I seemed to read in it that she had succeeded. However, she merely muttered something about the fire, and went across the room to attend to it. Kneeling there, she began to croon to herself that strange weird song that had no tune nor time to it, and which I had heard her sing before.

I was casting about in my mind for some means of speaking to her alone, without arousing Fanshawe's suspicions, or at least of getting rid of Fanshawe for a few moments, when the girl solved the difficulty for herself, and that too in the quaintest fashion. She suddenly looked up at me, with a queer smile on her face, and spoke.

"You know about that there princess you was talkin' of, guv'nor, don't yer?" she asked; then, without waiting for a reply, went on demurely enough: "I dunno' but wot I 'aven't worked out that story in me own way, after all."

"How's that, Moggs?"

"Can't that girl cease her chatter, and go?" demanded Fanshawe angrily, as he cast himself down on his bed, and lay there with his hands clasped under his head.

"'Alf a tick, guv'nor, 'alf a tick," remonstrated Moggs, turning to him; then she looked back at me. "Wot if you was to 'ear that the princess was fetched away by a ugly sort o' fairy—smuggled out, in a manner o' speakin'—an' brought to that ugly fairy's place" the thin cracked voice was growing excited—"an' 'id away by 'er—eh? Wot then? Serpose the princess crep' up the stairs without nobody seein' 'er——"

In my excitement I forgot everything; I suddenly seized the girl by the shoulder, and shook her, and cried out in my great relief: "Here, Moggs?—here

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in this house? How did you manage it? Where is she?"

Too late I saw that Fanshawe had raised himself on one elbow on the bed, and was staring at me and at the girl. I checked myself at once, and began haltingly to change the talk, so that it might seem I was speaking of something with which he was not concerned; but he brushed such pretence aside impatiently, and demanded to know what was happening.

"You've heard something—discovered something?" he said suddenly, sitting upright, and turning his haggard face towards me. "Oh!—don't shrink away; from to-night I tell you I am your friend, hand and glove with you in this business. I tell you I'm afraid; I dare not go on. Give me a chance," he pleaded, "and I'll undo all that I have done. You can't stand alone in this, Charlie; give me the chance to help you."

"You can't; you are ranged on the other side," I said sternly.

"I am not—I am not!" he exclaimed. "Don't I tell you that I'm afraid—that I dare not go on any further? Moggs"—he turned quickly to the girl, and spoke appealingly—"tell me where she is; you may trust me."

"I ain't so sure abaht that," said Moggs, looking from him to me, and back again. "More'n that," she added with cunning, "I ain't quite sure that I know what you're talkin' about." She walked to the door, giving me a sharp glance as she went, as though to bespeak my attention. With what carelessness I could muster I went after her; as I glanced back into the room I saw that Fanshawe, still raised on his elbow, was looking after me hungrily.

Outside on the dark landing it was a mere matter of excited whispers. "You've got her here—safe?" I asked.

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"Safe as twenty 'ouses!" she replied. "I waited abaht in the street until I sees me gentleman come out; arter that I never lost sight of 'im. The place wasn't so far from 'ere, arter all, an' it wasn't likely 'e was goin' to take no notice of anybody like me. I watched him go in, I seed 'im come out again. A minute later I was ringin' the bell, as innercent as yer please; an' there was a young person employed same as me in the 'ouse; I could talk to 'er in wot you might call me own language—found she was actually at the same Board School as wot I was. In less'n a minute we was talkin' friendly; five minutes arterwards I was upstairs, wiv the key turned in the lock, an' the young lady listenin' to wot I'd got to say."

"Dear, sweet Moggs!" I exclaimed in a whisper. "And she came with you at once?"

"That instant minute," said Moggs. "I mentioned who you was, an' that you was waitin' for 'er; it seemed that she'd on'y bin persuaded to stop there, believin' that the young gent was comin' any minute. Now she's in my room—right at the top, under the tiles—as safe as safe. Oh, I tell yer, it wants a woman for this work!"

I shook the diminutive creature's hand; I was just about to break out into some further expressions of gratitude, when her eyes warned me that we had a listener. I turned swiftly, in time to see a line of light down the edge of the door of the room—a line that was gradually narrowing, until it disappeared altogether as the door was closed. I understood at once that Jervis Fanshawe had been listening to all that had been said.

"It's all right," I assured her quickly. "I think he's our friend; in any case I can keep him silent. Go up and see Miss Savell; tell her that I'm near at

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hand, and that I will come up to her the moment I can slip away."

Moggs disappeared instantly, and I opened the door and went into the room. Fanshawe was seated on the side of the bed, with his hands pressed together between his knees, rocking himself slowly backwards and forwards. He seemed strangely excited, but I hardly noticed that at the time, in my indignation that he should have played the spy upon me.

"Why did you listen?" I asked.

"Why won't you trust me, Charlie?" He looked up at me, and there was again in his eyes that fear I had seen before. "I know that all I have done gives the lie to what I want to do; but I am sincere now, because I'm afraid. Won't you trust me?"

"There is no necessity for me to trust any one," I replied. "I don't know how much you know, or how much you don't; but I want to tell you this: it'll go hard with any one who tries again to defeat what I am trying to do. I've got my chance now to upset all the plans that you and those connected with you have made; for your own sake you'd better keep out of it."

"What are you going to do with her? What do you think you can do—you who are poor and weak and alone; what hope have you of fighting against richer men? I tell you you'll come to grief, and I shall walk for ever with the shadow of the dead Barbara by my side. I know it—I know it!"

"I tell you it is a matter that does not concern you," I said again. "Why should you expect me to trust to you—you whose long life has been a lie from beginning to end? Keep out of it, I tell you; it will go hard with you if you play me any tricks again."

I left him sitting in that dejected attitude; I heard him muttering again and again that I did not

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and I would not understand! I opened the door, and went out on to the staircase, meaning to see the girl Barbara, and to reassure her as to her safety. But while I stood there for a moment I heard voices down below, voices that I knew.

"I tell you you can't deceive me—an' you won't deceive me." It was the voice of Murray Olivant, loud and aggressive. And the voice of Dawkins replied to him.

"I tell you the girl has been spirited away. I've come here now in the hope of hearing something about her; perhaps that rascally servant of yours knows something—the fellow Tinman. On my solemn word, Olivant——"

"Oh, be quiet!"

I slipped back into the room to wait for them. Murray Olivant strode in first, and looked at me with a scowl; looked past me at Jervis Fanshawe, who had risen from the bed. "Well—plotters and schemers—what's the move now?" he demanded. "Is there any one here at all I can believe or trust?" He looked round on the three of us fiercely enough. "Dawkins here has her, and then he has not; you, Fanshawe, can do great things, but you don't do them; Tinman threatens and boasts, and does nothing. I suppose you think you can play with me just as you please, eh? Will no one speak?"

"I tell you again, Olivant, that I have not got the girl," said Dawkins. "I only came here in the hope to find her; I've been tricked, just as I tried to trick you. If I knew where she was, shouldn't I try to bluff the thing a bit, and get some money out of you?"

"I believe you would," retorted Olivant slowly Then he swung round to me. "Well, Tinman, and what do you know?"

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"Nothing," I replied. "I have not seen the lady at all."

"Why should she come here?" asked Fanshawe, in a quiet voice. I confess I had been expecting a totally different answer from him, and I began to wonder if, after all, I had misjudged the man. His face was a mask, behind which even the deadly fear that he had shown was hidden.

"Well, I trust *you*, at any rate, Fanshawe," said Olivant, "because I believe you know who's your friend, and who's likely to help you most in this world. This seems to rest with you, Dawkins," he went on, turning to his friend, "and I shan't forget to pay you for it, though not quite in the coin you expected. I'm going home; God help any one of you that plots against me again. You, Tinman, can walk with me; I believe you have some fears as to my safety," he added, with a grin.

The man Dawkins came down the stairs and into the street with us, still protesting his innocence in the matter; Murray Olivant waved him aside impatiently enough, and set off in the direction of his lodging. I think he had meant to take me with him; but within a hundred yards of the house he hailed a passing cab, and turned to dismiss me.

"You can go back," he said. "I shan't want you. You needn't be afraid; I shall go in the back way." He climbed into the cab, and was rapidly driven away.

I walked slowly back to the house, and rang the bell again. After I had climbed the stairs to Fanshawe's room I suddenly made up my mind that I would go on further, and see Barbara; altered my mind again, and determined to see Fanshawe, and at least to thank him for the attitude he had adopted to Murray Olivant. I opened the door and went in, but the man was not there.

Inwardly perturbed, I came out on to the landing

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again, and began slowly to climb the stairs; I did not like this sudden absence of Fanshawe in the least. On the landing above I came face to face with Moggs, standing outside a door, and looking at me with a scared white face.

"She's gorn!" she whispered.

"You must be mistaken," I exclaimed roughly, with all my old suspicions sweeping in upon me like a flood. "Where can she have gone to?"

"I dunno," whimpered the girl. "But I tell you she's gorn."

I ran out of the house, scarcely knowing what I meant to do. My thoughts turned naturally to the man who had made up his mind to get hold of Barbara; I determined to go to Murray Olivant at once. With difficulty, for it was now very late, I got to the place; and even then hesitated whether to go in or not. For in the first place, if I came face to face with him I must confess that I had lied, and that the girl had been in that other house even while he visited it.

The matter was determined for me, after all. I had got outside the rooms, and was standing there, hesitating what to do, when a man stopped before me, and spoke my name in a surprised voice. It was young Arnold Millard.

"Tinman!" Then suddenly and eagerly—"Where's your master?"

"Not there, sir," I replied quickly. "I—I don't know where he is."

We were standing on the opposite side of the street; he suddenly grasped my arm, and pointed. A window had been opened up above, and leaning out from a lighted room I saw for a moment the head and shoulders of Murray Olivant. The head was withdrawn in a moment, and the window closed and darkened, but we had both seen it distinctly.

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"Not there?" exclaimed the boy derisively. "So they've told me every time I've inquired. Hiding from me, is he?"

He ran across the street, and I ran after him, calling to him to stop. We both reached the stairs together, and together rushed up them; and by that time I had him by the arms, and was clinging to him, imploring him to calm himself. The noise we made when we got to the door of the flat alarmed that respectable man-servant inside; he opened the door a little way, and we stumbled in together, brushed him aside, and rushed pell-mell into the room where Murray Olivant stood. And there was not only Olivant there, but the man Dawkins and Jervis Fanshawe.

"I've found you at last," cried the boy excitedly. "I want to know where Miss Barbara Savell is?"

Murray Olivant looked quickly round from one to the other of us; saw me clinging to the boy, and whispering him—saw Dawkins and Fanshawe and the man-servant. Perhaps he felt that there was safety in numbers; at all events, he retreated to the door of an inner room, and spread his arms across it, as though to guard it.

"You fool!" he cried roughly—"she's here!"

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CHAPTER IX

I KNOW THE WAY AT LAST

FOR a moment, after that astounding statement by Murray Olivant, we stood transfixed, staring at him as he spread his arms across the door and faced us defiantly. I do not think that he had imagined his words would have such an effect; our amazed silence showed him in a moment that the game was with him. In a limp fashion I was clinging to young Millard, whose fury, as it seemed, had suddenly relaxed, leaving him helpless.

"Here?" gasped the boy, in a sort of horrified whisper.

"Yes!" cried Olivant loudly. "Here—by her own choice, and of her own free will. I suppose the girl can choose for herself—and in this case she has chosen wisely. Like every one else in this world, she knows on which side her bread is buttered. Now, get out of my place," he added, advancing towards us; "open the door there, you; show these people out."

Young Arnold Millard seemed suddenly to recover himself and his strength at the same time; I felt his muscles hardening under my grip. Then, with an inarticulate shout, he hurled himself straight at Olivant; and in a moment was fighting madly with Dawkins and myself to get at him. I remember noticing even then that Fanshawe stood aside, wring-

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ing his hands helplessly, and moistening his dry lips with his tongue.

"Let me go! It's a lie—I know it's a lie! Let me go!" shouted the boy, battling like a madman with us.

The frightened manservant had run out of the room, crying something as he went; it seemed an incredibly short space of time before he came hurrying in again, followed by a policeman. In a dexterous fashion this latter contrived to get between the boy and his enemy; interposed his solid official bulk between them.

"Now then—now then, gentlemen!" he said quietly. "What's the trouble here?"

Murray Olivant was the first to speak. "This man has forced his way into my rooms, and has threatened me," he said quickly. "I want him removed."

The constable glanced from one to the other; his face was impassive. "Do you know the man, sir?"

"He is a relative of mine—a ne'er-do-well, who has given considerable trouble to his friends," said Olivant. "He has been waiting outside in the street for some hours, on the chance of getting hold of me. The present dispute is about a lady."

"Constable, I demand to have these rooms searched; I mean to prove that this man is lying!" cried the boy excitedly. "He says—says the lady's here—and it is a lie!"

"You'll understand, sir, that I've no power to search this gentleman's rooms," said the constable; "and I've no right to inquire into any dispute about a lady or anything else. For your own sake, sir"—he was talking in an easy argumentative fashion to young Millard—"for your own sake, you'll go away. If you stop here there'll only be a breach of

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the peace committed, and you'll get yourself into my hands. If this don't blow over by the morning, I'm much mistaken; in any case, you can't create a disturbance here. Much better go away."

"I tell you I——" He made a sudden leap to pass the constable, and to reach the door of that inner room; but the man was too quick for him: he caught him by the arm, and deftly turned him towards the door; hustled him out of the room into the little hall. I was close at hand, and I heard what the man said.

"Now, sir, you're behaving very foolish. Go away, and go home and think about it; then see if you don't thank me in the morning. Come on now."

I put in my plea also, and presently the boy went away in a moody silence. The constable walked quietly after him, and as I ran down too I saw the man standing at the outer door leading into the street, looking after the boy as he strode away.

"A bit hot-headed, your friend," he said. "Lor' bless you, I've seen 'em like that a few times, and then ready to laugh about it next morning."

I went back to the rooms; there I found the startled manservant peering out at the door of the flat. He drew me inside, and carefully closed the door: seemed disposed, indeed, to question me.

"I give you my word I don't understand it," said the man. "Because, you see, there's never been any lady 'ere at all; an' nobody couldn't have got in without passing me Now, what I argue is——"

I thrust him aside, and walked into the room. There I found Murray Olivant lying back in a chair, shaking with laughter, while Dawkins and Jervis Fanshawe stared at him wonderingly. Seeing me, he sat up, and shook his head at me whimsically, and went off into another shout of laughter.

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"It's beautiful!" he cried—"it's wonderful! It only came to me on the spur of the moment to say that she was here; I wanted to see if that young fool would rise to the bait. And now he's gone off—and he's a marked man; that constable's not likely to let him come near me again in a hurry. Gone out like a whipped cur, with his tail between his legs. It was beautiful!"

"And he's left you with the girl," said Dawkins, with his smile.

Murray Olivant sat up, and stared at him. "What—haven't you tumbled to it yet?" he demanded. "There's no girl here—and there never has been. She'll come here sooner or later, no doubt; but she's not here now."

"Oh, come, my dear Olivant, you can't bluff me, you know," exclaimed Dawkins, beginning to show a little temper over the business. "The girl's here right enough."

"Open the door and look for yourself," said Olivant composedly. "Personally, I wish I could say that she had been here; but she hasn't."

Dawkins, after a glance at him, strode across the room, and flung open the door; turned up the light, and went poking and prying about. Fanshawe stood at the door of that inner room, and peered in also. Dawkins came out, and closed the door again.

"There are no other rooms," said Olivant, still laughing—"except my servadt's room across the hall. You can go and look in there, if you like."

"No, thank you," replied Dawkins. "But hang me if I thought it was a bluff to begin with—and neither did the boy. More than that, I don't quite see the object of it."

"Then I'll tell you," said Olivant, with a note of bitterness in his voice. "He's gone away now, eat-

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ing his heart out—mad with jealousy. If he meets her to-morrow, and she holds out her arms to him, he'll most likely turn away, and refuse to speak to her Love's a frail thing, and wants carefully nourishing Now get out, and leave me in peace," he added—"I'm tired."

Dawkins went at once; I think he saw the futility of attempting to speak to his patron about the matter further at that time. Fanshawe and I were just going also, when Murray Olivant, on a sudden impulse, as it seemed, called us back.

"Just one moment; I want to speak to you," he said. I noticed that a sudden seriousness had come over him; even the cigar he had picked up, and from which he had savagely wrenched the end with his teeth, remained unlighted. "Which of you knows anything about this young lady?"

"I don't," I replied at once, and looked at Fanshawe. For in my mind I was certain then that Fanshawe had in some way or other, after overhearing the conversation between Moggs and myself, contrived to get Barbara away. Nothing would persuade me to trust the man.

"And you, Fanshawe?"

"What should I know about her?" was the nervous reply. "What is she to do with me? You've got to manage this business for yourself, Mr. Olivant; it seems to me that your policy is to make other people work for you, and give them nothing but kicks in return. For my part, I wash my hands of it."

I felt sure that he was lying; I was certain in my own mind that he knew more than he would say. But, of course, I could say nothing then.

"You're very silent, Tinman," said Murray Olivant after a pause, during which we had stood helplessly

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watching him. "What's your opinion of this night's work?"

"My opinion is that Mr. Millard means to carry out his first threat," I replied slowly. I saw him look up at me, and the match he had lighted burned down to his fingers, so that he dropped it hurriedly. He made no attempt to light another.

"To kill me?"

I nodded. "I've seen him, as you haven't seen him; and I know that his life is wrapped up in this girl," I said earnestly. "He fears neither God nor man in such a business as this—and he's gone away to-night, believing that you have harmed her as you threatened—believing that she is lost to him. He's gone out to-night with murder in his heart. Don't I know that look—haven't I seen it?"

He threw away that second match, and laid down the cigar. After an uneasy pause he said slowly: "Well—I know that—and I know you're right. He's desperate, and perhaps with him I've gone a bit too far."

"Ah!" My relief at hearing him say that must have sounded in my voice, for he turned upon me quickly, with a sudden new fierceness.

"Don't misunderstand me. I've taken a wrong move to-night, but I mean to take another and a safer one. I'll not go back on what I mean to do; I'll not knuckle under to a young cub like that. It shall be as if the girl had really been here—only I'll work in a more secret fashion. I have a love for plotting and mystery; I'll leave that young fool staring up at these windows for a few days, and eating his heart out, and thirsting for my blood; and I'll be comfortably slipping away elsewhere. You shall help me, Tinman—and you too, Fanshawe—and I'll promise you some sport."

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"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"In the first place, I don't quite like the idea of being kept prisoner here, under the fear of what may happen if I venture outside. The boy's mad—but it's a sort of madness from which he may only wake when he has stuck a knife into me, or has done something else that may bring him to the gallows. That's too much of a risk for me; at the same time, I mean to get the whip hand of him. You and Fanshawe shall help me."

"Willingly—very willingly," said Fanshawe, speaking mechanically, and not raising his eyes. "You may trust us, Mr. Olivant; Tinman and I have no life that is not concerned with you and your affairs. But for you we must starve."

I looked at the despicable creature; I remembered what he had said to me, and what he had promised that very night; I was glad to think that I had not trusted him. I thought he looked at me strangely, when for a moment he raised his eyes to me; there was a look in them I did not understand.

"Well, I'm glad you recognize that fact," said Murray Olivant, with a laugh. "That's been my way always: to pay people to do things for me I don't care to do myself. You can listen, then, to my plans."

He was so exuberant about it, and chuckled so much to himself at the thought of it, that it was some time before he began to set it forth; and even then he prefaced the business with a sudden generous bringing out of bottles and glasses for our entertainment. Fanshawe drank greedily, with many slavish expressions of gratitude; I refused to take anything. At last Murray Olivant, standing with his back to the fire, and with a cigar stuck in the corner of his mouth, began to say what was in his mind.

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"Suppose that a certain man is threatened by another—goes, in fact, in fear of his life from a madman; and suppose that it is not convenient for him to have that other arrested, or cautioned, or withheld from what he means to do by the law. In other words, he does not wish a certain fair lady's name to be dragged into the light of day, and things said about her. I have always been mighty sensitive on such matters," he added complacently.

"You have indeed!" broke in Fanshawe, with a grin.

"Suppose I suddenly say that I am tired of the whole business, and that I have made up my mind to go abroad, and to leave these people in peace and security," went on Olivant. "Suppose I decide to take the faithful Tinman with me; suppose I even go so far as to take tickets on a certain steamer for the faithful Tinman and myself, and to publish the fact abroad that I'm going. And then suppose, after that, that I never go at all."

"But why not?" I asked helplessly; for I did not see his drift.

"Dolt! Everybody is expecting that I have gone; everybody knows that I have gone; and our young friend Millard, who hasn't money enough to follow me, and who has no reason for following me as I've left the coast clear, is thrown off the scent. I slip away quietly from this place, after sending a mountain of luggage—or no luggage at all, if it pleases me; and I go to an obscure lodging where no one thinks of looking for me. And in due course, after the vessel has sailed on which I am supposed to be, our dear Fanshawe here—or our faithful Tinman—making careful inquiries, discovers the lady, and brings her to me. I'm abroad, and all suspicions are lulled; I am at home, and am playing out to a finish the game I started upon."

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I saw the fiendish ingenuity of the thing at once. This man would publicly start off upon a voyage; his name would be entered upon the list of passengers; and he would quietly lie in hiding in London. The boy would feel that his vengeance had been snatched away from him; he would give up the battle in despair—only to learn too late the trick that had been played upon him. For my own part, I could do nothing; because to warn Arnold Millard of that trick would be but to put him more strongly and eagerly on the track of his enemy. I was powerless; Olivant and Fanshawe would play the game out to the end, and I should have to look on, a helpless spectator. There might be a faint chance that the girl would not be found by either of them; on the other hand, I had a shrewd suspicion that Fanshawe already knew where she was. I was certain in my own mind that he had smuggled her away from the house in which he lodged that very night; that explained his presence in Murray Olivant's rooms at the time I reached them with the boy.

"You'll come here to-morrow, Tinman," said Olivant, with a yawn, "and I'll give you money to get the tickets, and full instructions. Then I'll tell you where to engage a lodging for me, and under what name. I mean to play the game thoroughly, I assure you; not a living soul shall suspect who I am; no one shall know till long afterwards that I have not sailed for another country. It's a beautiful scheme; we'll work it out to-morrow."

It was getting well into the small hours when I came down the stairs at last, with Jervis Fanshawe at my heels. I could not trust myself then to speak to him; I held him in such loathing that I was afraid of what I might do. He spoke to me once as I walked away, but I paid no attention to him. I walked

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on and on doggedly, wondering bitterly what I should do, and realizing more every moment how helpless I was; seeing only that I was beating feeble hands against a wall that I could not break down.

Suddenly he plucked me by the sleeve in a quiet street through which we were passing; I turned suddenly, and faced him. As he shrank away from me, my rage overmastered me, and I caught him by the throat and forced him to his knees.

"Where are you driving me?" I demanded hoarsely. "Is not once enough, in a lifetime such as yours, to strive to ruin a woman; is there no mercy in your black heart at all?"

"You don't understand," he faltered.

"I understand only too well," I retorted savagely. 'Was it for this you met me when I came from prison; was it for this that you have drawn me on and on, until I am as desperately involved in this business as yourself? What of your lying promises—your pleadings that I would trust you?"

"Indeed—indeed I only mean well—indeed I want to help her!" he exclaimed, staggering to his feet, and trying to pull my hands away from his collar. "I can't tell you; I can't explain."

"The dead woman you have seen—whose eyes have looked into yours—did she teach you nothing?" I demanded.

He suddenly covered his face with his hands, and shuddered. "She taught me something I shall not forget," he whispered. "Only I must go on and on; I dare not look back. I have set my hand to something, and I will not stop now!" He raised his haggard face to the sky, and if I had not had that desperate hatred of him in my heart, I must have been moved by the strange look upon it.

"No, you will not turn back, until you have brought

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this child to ruin and disgrace," I said. "But it may be given to me to spoil your game yet; this new move on the part of Olivant may lead to something he has not reckoned upon—or you either."

"Yes, it may," he said; and he seemed to shudder again.

A clock near at hand in a church tower struck three over the sleeping city. I told Fanshawe I would not go back with him then; I would walk the streets until daylight. He tried to dissuade me from that, but seeing that I had made up my mind he presently turned away, and set off towards his lodging. I tramped the streets until dawn—staring now and then into the faces of poor wanderers that flitted past me, in the vain hope of seeing the girl; but there was no face like hers.

I got some breakfast at a coffee stall, and felt refreshed and less hopeless. As I turned to go away, I heard a voice beside me giving an order for some coffee; I turned quickly, and saw that it was young Arnold Millard. He looked forlorn and tired and haggard; I was doubtful at first whether to speak to him. I decided, however, that I might do some good, if I persuaded him that Murray Olivant was about to leave the country; it might at least drive out of his mind the murderous thought that obsessed it then. I ventured to touch his sleeve; he looked round quickly, and recognized me.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked.

"I wanted to say something about last night, sir," I replied in a whisper. "Surely it was better I should prevent you from doing what was in your mind."

He took the cup of coffee from the man, and began to drink it, without replying to me. I went on speaking after a moment or two in an eager whisper.

"He lied to you, the young lady was not there at

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all," I said. "More than that, he's failed to get hold of her, and he's giving up the game. He goes abroad to-morrow. And I don't know where the young lady is."

He looked at me over the cup he held, and spoke sternly. "It's a lie—and you know it," he said slowly. "Look me in my eyes now—fair and square—and tell me that he's going away."

I suppose I was never a good hand at that business of deceit; I tried now to raise my eyes to his; tried to get some words out that should bravely defend the statement I had made. But the words would not come, and my eyes fell. I turned away hurriedly, and I heard his derisive laughter echoing after me as I went. I knew that I had only made matters worse.

I had gone but a few yards when he overtook me; seized me roughly by the shoulder, and swung me round, so that I faced him. "You are his servant and his slave," he said contemptuously, "and so I suppose you must lie for the sake of your bread and butter. But tell him that his lies won't serve him; tell him that my mind is as firmly made up about him as it ever will be about anything. I know he's hiding from me—but that shan't serve him. Tell him from me that I mean to kill him, just as I said I would. It's his body for her soul: a fair exchange!"

I would have protested further, but he waved me aside impatiently, and strode off into the darkness. I wondered then if there was any man in London that morning quite so miserable as I was: any man who had failed in everything he had undertaken as I had failed. I had started out so well, with such high hopes and such high ideals—and, lo! they had all come to nothing, and it was written that I was to fail again.

I carried that thought with me through all the

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long day. It was with me when presently I went to Murray Olivant's flat, and stood with apparent humility before him, while he looked through his letters and toyed with his breakfast; it was with me when he put the money into my hands that was to pay, in part, for his trick—that money with which I was to purchase the steamer tickets. He had decided to go by a comparatively small vessel to the Mediterranean; or, at all events, to let it be thought that he was going by that vessel. I remember that it was called the *Eaglet*; and he kept up that mad trick so that he was even careful as to the choosing of his cabin. I was supposed to accompany him, and a berth was engaged for me.

I went back to him later in the day, carrying the tickets with me. I found the place in disorder, and the manservant covering everything up, and locking drawers and cupboards; Olivant himself was destroying a great mass of letters. So thorough was the business that I observed with some surprise some new clothing, of a cheaper and commoner pattern than that usually worn by him; it was only after the manservant had left the room that he told me what this clothing was intended for.

"I do everything thoroughly, Tinman," he said, with a chuckle. "Everything here is packed up and left; Murray Olivant walks out of the place, and disappears from that moment. The world believes he goes on board the *Eaglet*, to start for a pleasure cruise. As a matter of fact he goes in those clothes"—he pointed to the new garments I had before noticed—"and he turns up in another place, and under another name. You will know that other place, because you will be there with me; and Jervis Fanshawe will know it also; but that's all. I shall not have a scrap of paper about me, nor a mark on my clothes by which

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any one can point to me and say, 'That's Murray Olivant!' I'm going to begin a new life with that sweet child Barbara (she's bound to be found; she'll be glad enough to come back to me)—and I shall keep that life up for just as long as I wish. I'm taking money enough to last me, in a modest way, until I resurrect Murray Olivant, and bring him back again."

I was busied all that day on various errands for him; it was late in the evening when he suddenly put a newspaper before me, and pointed to an advertisement. "That's the place for me," he said; "top rooms, and quiet and secluded. Do you know Lincoln's Inn Fields?"

I stared at the paper; it shook and rustled in my fingers. "I wouldn't go there," I said, while a great trembling seized upon me. "I wouldn't go there if I were you?"

"Why, what's the matter with the man?" He snatched the paper from me, and laughed. "Do you think the place will be too dreary, or too quiet? Or do you think I might see ghosts there?"

"I think you might see ghosts there," I replied.

"Well, I'm not afraid of that," he retorted. "Go at once and see the people; if the rooms are all right, take them. Here's money; pay a quarter in advance. You need not give any names, or anything of that sort; it's a small place, and the money ought to be sufficient."

It was at that moment that there came a knock at the outer door; immediately afterwards Jervis Fanshawe was announced. Murray Olivant, who seemed elated at the prospect of his new adventure, pointed to the advertisement, and showed it to Fanshawe.

"Tinman here doesn't seem to like the idea of Lincoln's Inn Fields," said Oliphant with a laugh. "What's your opinion, Fanshawe?"

Jervis Fanshawe stared at the newspaper for a mo-

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ment or two; then he raised his eyes to mine. It seemed in that moment, as he looked at me, that there was a frightened look in his face; I wondered if he read my own thoughts. "Yes," he said, turning to Olivant, and handing back the newspaper, "I should think Lincoln's Inn Fields is the very spot."

I secured the rooms within an hour. It was strange to me to walk again in that place, over whose pavements my uneasy feet had trod twenty years before, what time I waited for Gavin Hockley. I was glad to find that the rooms were not in that building; but they were too close at hand to be pleasant. I walked away, with the old thoughts beginning to surge up again in my brain; and once again I was desperately afraid. I knew that some grim Fate was driving me on; I could only set my weak shoulders against the storm that pressed me forward; but I was powerless to stay the force of it.

I came away from the flat, leaving Jervis Fanshawe and the man-servant still there. I understood that the manservant was to be sent away that night, and the flat locked up. I walked to the lodging that the elder Barbara had taken; I felt that I owed it to her to tell her at least that her child was gone, but was safe from Murray Olivant. The decent woman who opened the door to me told me that "Mrs. Avaline" was at home; it had only occurred to me at the last moment to ask for her in that name she had given herself.

Barbara met me at the door of the room; she held out her hands to me, and seemed, I thought, strangely excited. Nor would she for a moment let me into the room; she stood there looking at me, and I felt her hands tremble in mine.

"Guess—guess what has happened!" she whispered; and at the look in her eyes I suddenly felt myself trembling too. I thrust her aside, and went quickly

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into the little shabby room. A lamp was burning on the table, and some needlework lay beside it. And on a couch under the window lay that younger Barbara—peacefully sleeping.

I stood there, looking down at her like a man in a dream; I could not understand what had happened. It was only when the mother began to speak to me in her quiet voice that I understood how she had found the child.

"I wanted to see you—to be near you; I went to that address you had told me, where you were living with Fanshawe," she said softly. "I waited about, afraid to go in; and while I waited there I saw you come out with the man I suppose must have been Murray Olivant—the man I had seen down at Hammerstone Market. I could not speak to you then; I waited in the hope that you would return. And while I waited I saw this dear girl come stealing out of the place like a frightened ghost; I knew, of course, who she was, because I had seen her down at the old house, and because she is so like what I was so long ago. She did not know me, of course; she never will know me; but when I spoke to her she seemed to turn in her distress and fear to me instinctively. She came here with me willingly; she will be safe here for the present."

"Thank God!" I whispered, as I looked down at the sleeping girl. "This is all as it should be; now we can decide what is best to be done."

"I mean to take her back to her father," she said quietly. Then, as I started and looked at her, she shook her head quietly, and smiled. "Don't be afraid, Charlie; I'm not going back to him myself. I could not do that now. But the girl is different; the girl must go back to the home that is hers—and to her father."

"There to be found by Murray Olivant whenever

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he likes," I reminded her. "You have forgotten that. You—an unknown woman; I—a felon and an outcast; what can we do to protect her against him?" I stood there looking down at the sleeping girl; my heart was beating fast. "But I think I know the way," I said slowly.

"You know the way?" She was looking at me keenly.

"Yes, the way I took before," I whispered, without looking at her. "God is good; he has given my enemy into my hands at last!"

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CHAPTER X

TOO LATE!

FOR now it all seemed straight and plain before me; now I saw clearly the pointing finger of Fate, and trembled no more at the task I had to face. Who was I, that I should ever have hung back at all, or should ever have dreaded the road on which my feet had been firmly set from the first. I looked down at the sleeping girl, and my heart was filled with a great gratitude that God had snatched me from death and from prison, and had reserved me for this. I thanked Him humbly that there was no other man in all the wide world so trained and fitted for the task as I was.

I saw it all clearly enough at last. The time was coming when this poor tangled love story would be set right; when the boy would come naturally and by instinct to the girl, and would take her in his arms, with a very perfect understanding of her purity and her innocence; so much had been ordained from the first. If they gave a thought to me, it would only be as the poor unknown grey-headed man that had been called Tinman, and had flitted into their lives for a brief hour, and flitted out again, and so been done with. Even the woman who stood beside me—that elder Barbara—was only mercifully permitted to look on at the completion of the love story she and I might have lived ourselves. After all, God had been very good to me.

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"I don't understand," Barbara was saying to me, as we stood beside the sleeping girl. "What way will you take?—what will you do?"

"You will know presently," I whispered, lest I should wake the sleeper. "In any case, I want you to promise one thing: I want you to take the girl back to her father, and to leave her safely in his hands. Promise me—swear to me that nothing shall turn you from that purpose; nothing that you hear—nothing that you suspect. All that I hope to do, and all that I shall strive to do, will be brought to naught if you fail me in that."

"I promise, my dear," she said solemnly. "But Olivant?"

"Will trouble her no more," I replied. "I wonder if you remember what I said to you once—twenty long years ago?"

"I hope I remember," she whispered. "Say the words again."

"I lay under sentence of death; I was to die the next morning. You came to me; you had travelled hard and fast to reach me before they killed me. Do you remember?"

She bowed her head, and whispered that she did. I went on—repeating the words I had used so long before; they had been in my mind many many times since, and I had not forgotten them.

"This is what I said to you. 'In the years that are coming it may happen, in God's own good time, that some child you love may stand in need of a friend who will strike as I struck—fight as I fought—for her honour. It may happen, long after I am dead and forgotten by all but you, that some such an one may spring up, to do again more perfectly what I did—springing from the dead ashes of my past to work out the pitiful story I began.' Do you remember?"

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"Perfectly," she whispered; and now she looked at me with startled eyes.

"I never thought then," I went on, "that it would fall to me to do again what I did then; I was as one dead when I spoke those words. But all things have fitted in so wonderfully and so strangely; there is no drawing back for me, and there is no one else who can strike the blow—no one with a greater right."

She drew me away out of the room, and closed the door; we stood together on the landing outside, looking into each other's eyes—I very calm and resolute, and she trembling and afraid.

"You must not think of it," she whispered; "you must never think of it. There must be some other way—some better way. Not again, Charlie—for the love of God!—not again!"

"There is no other way," I replied. "It is her soul against his body; when you think of that, there is no question. Besides, what does it matter? In the sight of men my hands are stained with blood——"

(She seized my hands suddenly, and put her lips to them!)

"—And at the worst it may happen that I pay the penalty I earned before. Besides," I added solemnly, "I do not do this of myself. Step by step—day by day—I have seen what was coming; I dare not draw back now, whatever happens. If it is a crime, then the man himself has drawn it down upon his own head. Think of what he has done: to get hold of this girl he has banished himself out of the world; has played a trick, to persuade people that he is going on a long voyage, while in reality he is in hiding—waiting like a spider in his web—crouching ready to spring. Think of that, Barbara; if I kill him to-night, I kill a man who has no name, who is unknown; Murray Olivant will be in another place altogether. For his own purposes

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he has covered up my footsteps—the footsteps of the man setting out to kill him. There is a fate in this; I dare not draw back."

She clung to me, and begged that I would think of her and of the girl; implored me to remember that whereas the crime for which I had been shut away before was one of personal vengeance, with the hot blood of youth for excuse, this was a deliberate thing, done for others with whom I was not personally concerned. Upon that point, however, I threw a new light.

"The girl sleeping there is but the image of the Barbara I loved; the boy who would strike this blow, if I did not, represents what I was—must represent in the future what I might have been under happier circumstances. I strike now for the love I bore you, Barbara, and bear you still; and because I know that if I do not this boy must step in, and commit the crime for which I suffered through twenty long years. There is no hope that he will turn back, any more than there is any hope that Murray Olivant will give up his purpose."

She wept and implored me; to comfort her a little I presently promised that if I saw any other way I would take it; but in my own heart I knew there was no other way.

"Remember—my dear—my dear," she pleaded, "that we have both had to suffer so much—to lose so much—to give up so much. Remember, too, what my position is now; that it is my fate to stand as a mere kindly stranger beside my child, and never to let her know who I really am. I must live out my life alone, as I have lived it these many years; I cannot go back now; the old Barbara Savell lies in the depths of the sea. That is my punishment, Charlie; don't make it harder to bear than it is."

I went out into the streets, and made my way to the rooms occupied by Fanshawe. Not that I wanted to

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see the man: I hated him too cordially for that; but that I felt I must be strong for the work that was before me, and must get some proper rest. I was worn out already with that long night spent in tramping about the streets; I knew I must sleep, if sleep was possible; I set all my mind upon that, because so much depended on whether my nerves served me well when the time came for what I had to do.

Fan shawe was out when I arrived, but he came back within a few minutes—coming into the room in some excitement, I thought, as though he had been hurried. He tossed his hat on to the bed, and came across to where I was seated, and clapped me on the shoulder jocosely.

"Well, my Charlie!" he exclaimed, "what's the news with you—eh?"

I looked up at him sourly enough. "No news," I replied.

"No sign of the girl yet? No whisper of where she is?"

I faced round upon him angrily. "Leave her name alone," I said. "If I knew anything I shouldn't tell you, and I warn you that if you try to meddle in any way in the matter, you'll have to reckon with me in a fashion you little suspect. Mind—I mean it!"

I had half expected that he would fly into a passion, as I had seen him do on other occasions; instead, he looked at me almost wistfully out of his deep eyes for a moment before he turned away.

"You won't understand, Charlie," he said. "I only want to help the girl—I only want her to think well of me."

I laughed at him openly; I thought he played the game poorly enough; I felt that he had perhaps got a notion that if he was soft with me, I might be led to tell him anything I knew. I hardened my heart; for I

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had had too much of this man not to be able to judge him for what he really was.

He brought out some liquor presently, and I, being faint and weary, readily drank with him. Not a word was said for a long time; until presently, leaning across the table, and tapping upon it with his long bony fingers, he whispered a word or two that startled me.

"Charlie—Charlie!" Then, as I glanced up at him, and saw his hungry eyes fixed upon me, he went on in tones little above a whisper, and with a curious mocking grin on his face: "Charlie!—how does it feel to kill a man?"

I turned round slowly; I saw in a moment that he had read my secret. My fear was not that he might do anything to me; my only dread was that he might warn Murray Olivant, if indeed he had not already done so.

"What do you mean?" I asked hoarsely.

"You're a man of evil passions, Charlie—of hot and sudden passions," he said. "Twenty years ago you killed Gavin Hockley—struck him down, as you might have struck any noxious beast in your way. Your blood was up, Charlie"—he had risen excitedly to his feet, and was leaning across the table towards me, with his hands gripping the edges, and his eyeballs almost starting from their sockets—"you were like a man rushing into battle, caring nothing for what you did. That was fine—that was noble; but afterwards, Charlie—afterwards?"

"I don't understand you," I said feebly.

"When the thing was done; when you crept out into the streets, knowing what you'd left behind you. Tell me, Charlie—tell me; did it creep down the stairs in your wake—bloody and horrible; did you hear its feet pattering on the stones in quiet streets; did you look over your shoulder, and see its glazing eyes staring

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at you—its mouth with the drooping jaw striving to scream 'Murder!' after you? Tell me, Charlie."

"I forget," I replied. "After all—what does it matter now?"

"But suppose, Charlie—only suppose," he went on, in that same hoarse whisper—"imagine for a moment that you set out to do it again?"

I sprang to my feet, and confronted him. "What madman's talk is this?" I demanded, with a glance at the door. "What are you talking about?"

"Suppose, Charlie," he went on, paying no heed to my excitement—"suppose that this time you set out—not in the heat of passion—not because the man had injured you—but to do it in cold blood! Suppose you crept up his stair—and listened at his door—and stole in upon him——"

I clapped my hand suddenly over his lips. "Silence!" I cried—"you don't know what you're talking about. I've forgotten all I did; it's twenty long years ago. Don't remind me of it." For I thought in that way I might divert his thoughts into another channel; I was firmly persuaded that in some amazing fashion he had guessed what I was about to do, and was endeavouring to screw the truth of it out of me.

He had dropped back into his chair, and was looking at me cunningly between half-closed lids. I had determined by that time that he should not stop me; I was certain of that, even while I realized that the time must surely come when he would denounce me, and cry out that I had done this thing. The thought of that did not stay me in the least; I meant to go on. But the natural desire to shield myself, if possible—the sheer human instinct of self-preservation—told me that I must if possible throw him off the scent. I began to talk to him with what ease I might.

"Come, Fanshawe—it's not for you and me to talk

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of murder," I said. "Why should I do again what I have done once already? What reason would there be in it?"

"No reason—no reason at all, Charlie," he said, plucking at his lips with his long fingers, and watching me. "I don't know what put the idea into my mind to-night—I don't know what made me think of it. Only I would give something to know just what a man feels, when he creeps away, and leaves behind him that dead thing that was but a moment before alive and strong. It would be something to know what one feels like then. And the weapon, Charlie—what of the weapon?"

I remembered then that I had seen that day in a marine-store dealer's, not a hundred yards from the place where now we talked, the weapon I meant to serve my purpose. It was a strong sailor's knife in a leather sheath—a powerful thing, with a hilt well worn by hands that had grasped it many times; I had stood outside the shop, and had looked at my own hand, and had felt how perfectly it would fit round the handle. I stared at him now as he spoke, and wondered if by any chance he had seen me looking in at that window, and had read my thoughts.

"You know the weapon I used," I said, in a low voice. "It was an old sword."

"I know, Charlie—I know," he said, nodding. "But if you did it again—if you wanted to do it more quickly and more cleanly—what then? A knife's a good weapon; what about a knife, Charlie?"

I felt sick and faint; I got up, and went to the window, and threw it open. It was a fine night—a night of stars and of peace, even with London throbbing in the streets down below me. I thought of the child who had lain asleep—of the mother who watched over her; I thought of the man who was plotting against that

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little Barbara, and my heart hardened. Though a hundred Fanshawes stood in the way, I meant that this thing should be done, and that the man should die. I had bungled it somehow, so that Fanshawe knew; I must pay the penalty of that afterwards. One thought was in my mind, and one only: he should not stop me.

"Have you seen the boy—young Arnold Millard?" I asked, more for the sake of saying something than in the hope of gaining information.

"I saw him to-day," replied Fanshawe slowly: "still hanging about that place. I wonder what would happen if by chance he found out where Olivant is going?"

"I'm afraid we know what would happen," I replied. "What's the use of talking about it?"

It seemed impossible for him to get away from that subject; he came back to it again and again. I remember that he crossed the room, and came and stood near to me, looking down into the street, and speaking in a whisper.

"If a man struck down another like that—for a fine noble reason, Charlie—would that be wrong? I mean, would it be so vile as it might be if a man did it for any worse motive? If he did it—and escaped; for how long would it haunt him afterwards? You remember, Charlie; for how long did you think about it—and remember it? Did the blood-stained thing come to you in dreams—mock at you, and haunt you. One would like to know that."

"Look here," I said roughly. "You've got some strange idea in your head."

"No—no; not in my head, Charlie; I was only supposing—putting a case," he broke in hurriedly.

"Well, don't suppose—and don't put cases," I cried savagely. "All that has been done is done

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with; why should you rake it up? Am I likely to do again what I did before?—to put my neck once again in the noose?"

"No, Charlie," he faltered—"of course not."

"Very well, then—leave it alone," I urged. "I'm worn out, and I need sleep; I mustn't be late to-morrow; there are many things to be seen to."

He said he would sit up for a time; at his suggestion I threw myself down on the bed, dressed as I was, and fell asleep. The last vision I had of him was as he sat at the table, with a flaring candle throwing ghostly shadows of him on the wall and ceiling, and with his plucking hands for ever at his lips. He watched me, even as I watched him, out of half-closed eyes; I wondered how much he knew, or how much he guessed.

I woke long after daylight, to find him gone. There was for a moment in my heart that little swift pang of excitement that comes to any one of us, when, on waking, we remember some urgent and difficult thing that has to be done before we sleep again—a journey, or an interview, or anything else shut in between sunrise and sunset of one particular date; but no more than that. I had no worldly affairs to set right—no one I need consult; no peace to make with any one. I had long ago told myself that this was right, and that to this end I must surely come. In doing it I was to save two people: the girl in the first place, and the boy in the second. For I knew inevitably that young Arnold Millard would carry out his threat, and that, too, with less hesitation if he found his enemy hidden away, as Murray Olivant was to be hidden away that day.

I went again to the marine-store dealer's; saw with satisfaction that the knife was still there. I had money in my pocket—part of the amount that had

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been handed to me on the previous day by Olivant; I went into the shop, and asked that I might look at the knife. A dingy old man behind the counter adjusted his spectacles to look at me; perhaps he wondered that a tall grey-haired man, with bowed shoulders and with a respectable black suit on, should want such a weapon as that. But he pulled it out of the window, and spread it out before me; I muttered something about wanting it for a present. I pulled it out from its sheath, and felt the edge of it; there was a deadly sharpness about it that made me shudder involuntarily, as I remembered where that sharpness was to be planted.

It was old and well-worn, but in good condition; the sheath was suspended from a narrow black belt, meant to buckle round the waist. I did not care to put it on there; I got the man to wrap it up for me, paid him for it, and came away. Presently, in a quiet street, I tore away the paper wrapping, and buckled the thing round my waist, setting the sheath in such a way at my back that I could easily reach the hilt of the knife. Then I buttoned my coat, and went on towards Lincoln's Inn Fields.

When I got there I found that Olivant had not yet arrived; it flashed across me in a moment that he did not even know yet that I had secured the rooms, and that he would be waiting until I could reach him, and give him the keys of the place. Cursing myself for my carelessness, and fearing that he might decide after all, on some whim, not to take the rooms, I hurried off to his flat. I climbed the stairs to reach it, and kuocked at the door.

After some little delay he opened the door himself, and peered out at me; flung the door wide, on seeing who it was, and let me in. He was in his dressing gown, and as he strode across the hall and into his

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sitting-room I remembered suddenly that the manservant had been sent away the night before, and that Olivant was alone there. A sudden feeling that I might do it then swept over me, and my hand instinctively went to the knife at my back.

I was sane enough to remember in a moment that I had been seen coming and going from that place over and over again; to remember also that young Millard had waited outside there, and had forced his way into those rooms, and had been ejected from them. That momentary impulse on my part, if carried out, might ruin everything; I must wait until Murray Olivant had voluntarily hidden himself.

He was in a vile temper; in sending away his manservant he had forgotten that he could get no breakfast without the man's assistance. I hurriedly set to work to prepare coffee; he fumed about the rooms, roundly cursing me, and declaring over and over again that he'd give up this fool's business, and remain comfortably where he was.

"I've been in too much of a hurry," he declared. "I might have known I should have to suffer every sort of discomfort; I ought not to have been afraid of what Millard would do. It's absurd."

"The rooms are taken, and they're very snug and comfortable," I reminded him. "You'll have the laugh of every one if you slip off there. The thing has been so well planned."

"So it has," he replied, with a smile breaking over his face. "By Jove!—you're right there, Tinman; it's been devilishly well planned. As soon as I've had my breakfast I'll slip out—(by the back way, Tinman, for fear of accidents)—and later in the day I'll make my way to Lincoln's Inn Fields. I'll wander about for a bit—enjoying a new sort of freedom; dine somewhere quietly, and go there this evening. Have

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you got in a stock of what I shall need—wines and spirits, and so forth ? "

I assured him that he would find everything he required ; I left the keys with him, explaining carefully which of them fitted the various doors. One thing only I did not tell him : that I had a duplicate key of the outer door, given to me by the agents from whom I had taken the place. They had explained to me that the rooms had been previously occupied by two friends, so that the second key had been necessary. I remember that when that second key came into my hands I felt again that Fate had played her cards well, and had given me all I asked, and more.

" I don't quite know what time I shall be there, Tinman," said Olivant, just before I left. " You can hang about a bit if I'm not there, and wait till I come. I'm expecting Jervis Fanshawe to come here this morning ; he may have some news for me. By the way, don't blunder over this, Tinman."

" Blunder ? " I stared at him stupidly.

" Yes ; don't be telling people that I'm still in London ; remember that I've sailed on the *Eaglet*, and that I'm not coming back for months. Tell everybody that. And if you see Fanshawe at his lodgings, send him to me at once."

I decided, of course, that I would not do that in any case. Already I began to fear that what I had said I should do would not be done after all ; Fanshawe had guessed my secret, and was going that morning to see Olivant ; obviously the first thing he would do would be to put Olivant upon his guard. I wondered how Fanshawe had come to guess what I had believed to be so securely locked in my own heart ; I blamed myself that I had not been more careful in guarding the very expression of my face. However, I knew that I must risk all now upon the one throw.

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The events of that day are stamped clearly enough upon my recollection; almost I seem to see myself walking again through the streets, waiting for the hour when I could make for Lincoln's Inn Fields. Just as on that other occasion, when I had set about a similar business, so now I found myself going back to scenes I knew, and looking again at various places, as it were for the last time. For I had counted my chances; and I knew that even while every door seemed closed that could by any possibility let suspicion in, one might be standing open, and I unable to see it. If once Murray Olivant were recognized, that confidential servant who had been seen about with him must be looked for; must be discovered to be a certain Charles Avaline—who had killed a man before, and barely escaped the gallows for his crime. I counted the chances, and the scale weighed heavily against me.

I drifted back in the course of that long day to the rooms from which Murray Olivant must long since have gone, and there caught a glimpse of a lurking figure that I knew must be Arnold Millard. He did not see me; he was doggedly pacing up and down, watching that empty cage, and waiting for his man, who would not come out of that place again.

Then I went to the lodging where Barbara and the girl had been the night before; I wondered if Barbara had yet kept her promise to take the girl away, back to her father. Surely in time, I thought, young Millard must drift back there, and meet the girl; and so round off the love story in which I was so strongly interested.

I found I could not eat; twice I had gone into various places, and ordered a meal, and left the food untouched. And yet I did not seem to need food; all sensation seemed dead within me, or at all events

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only sharpened to the point of what I had to do. And so at last I came in the dusk into Lincoln's Inn Fields; found the house, and climbed the stairs.

I listened at the door for a moment or two; then softly pushed the key into the lock, and passed into the rooms. They were in darkness, and for a moment or two I stood listening, wondering if the man had yet arrived. Then I called his name, and heard it echoing through the ghostly silent place, and coming back at me as though in mockery—

"Mr. Olivant! Mr. Olivant!"

I came out again, and lingered about near the house. There were few people about at that time; only once a pair of lovers passed me, as another pair of lovers, twenty years before, had walked in front of me on such a night in that place. I found myself wondering idly what had become of that first pair; whether they had been parted, or whether they had married, or what had become of them. Even while I thought that, I saw Murray Olivant striding along the pavement in the distance, with his cigar stuck in one corner of his mouth, and a thin trail of smoke floating behind him.

I got out of the way hurriedly, and let him go into the house without seeing me. I stood there, trying to think how he would climb the stairs—how long it would take him to reach this landing, and now that; so many more moments for his fumbling with a lock he did not understand; and now he was in the place, waiting for me!

And then all at once I felt that I could not do it. I turned away, sick at heart; I began to invent excuses why I should not do it. I had soiled my hands once with blood in my own cause; I would not do it again for another. I was afraid; I weakly told myself that another way would be found, and that Murray Oliv-

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ant's triumph would be cut short. But not by me.

I went away into the busier streets, and I walked about for more than an hour. It was quite dark when I got back at last to the place, and even then I think I had made up my mind that I could not do it. I found myself praying, as I went up the stairs, that he might insult me—might even attack or strike me—so that I might be forced to do the thing, and to do it not in cold blood. If only it might be a matter of fighting —some desperate business that should nerve my arm for the one necessary moment—then I would not mind.

I climbed the stairs, and reached the door of the rooms. As I fumbled for my key, I suddenly discovered that the door was open a couple of inches; I put my hands against it, and went quietly in. The place was in darkness; but I remember that I had that curious feeling that one has, even in the darkness, that there was some one there near me. I called out the man's name again, as I had done before—

"Mr. Olivant! Mr. Olivant!"

Only the echoes floated back to me; I could not understand what the silence meant. At last with trembling fingers I got out a match-box, and struck a light, and looked about me.

I saw that the table had been set out with a decanter and a glass; there was a half-smoked cigar lying there, and it had burnt a hole in the faded table-cloth. A candlestick had been overturned, and the candle had rolled away a few inches from it. I set them upright, and put the match to the candle. In doing that I came to the edge of the table, and mechanically looked over; I started back with a cry.

Murray Olivant was there in his own rooms, after all. But he lay stiff and stark, with his face upturned to the ceiling, and his dead eyes staring up at me. He

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was stone dead; his hand still gripped the knife that had been plunged straight into his breast, as though in his death agony he would have torn it out.

I was too late; some one had been there before me.

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CHAPTER XI

I TELL THE TRUTH

MY first thought, after that ghastly discovery, was to run to the outer door and close it. After that, the mere coming back into the room was an effort; I was afraid of that grim thing lying there, stark and still, with the knife sticking in its breast—afraid most of all of what it suggested.

For I saw now that a hatred greater and deeper than mine had pursued this man, and had struck him down before my slower vengeance could reach him. As I stood in the room, in that silence greater than any silence I had known before, I realized that all that I had feared, and all that I had fought against had happened, after all: the boy had been here before me, and had struck down his enemy. There was no doubt about that at all: all the precautions Murray Olivant had taken had availed him nothing. Surely and resolutely young Arnold Millard had tracked him down, and had killed him, as he had sworn to do.

I stood there by the table for what seemed a long time, wondering what I should do. For now the instinct to cover up this crime was stronger in me than it would have been had the man been struck down by my own hands. In a pitiful fashion I knew the business, and had paid the penalty of it before; I should have gone into it, and indeed had meant to go into it, with my eyes open, knowing well the desperate

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risk I ran. But with the boy it was different; he was only poor Charlie Avaline again, of twenty years before, who had flung himself upon this man in sheer bitter rage, and without thought of what he must pay for the blow.

I looked about the room. A chair had been overturned, and I guessed that Murray Olivant had made something of a struggle with his murderer, but had had no chance really to defend himself. The candle I had seen knocked over seemed to suggest that the man who had struck the blow had knocked over the light, in sheer horror of that dying face staring up at him: that seemed natural enough. There was nothing else disturbed; a glass upon the table held a little whisky and soda still, and on the rim of it were to be seen the impression of the lips of the drinker. The cigar that had burnt its way into the table-cloth had long since gone out. The whole place was unnaturally still.

I stood there looking down at the dead man; for if the truth be told I dared not put the table between us; there was an uncanny feeling in me that he might stir, and get up, and come towards me—dead, and yet moving—with that knife sticking out of him. I kept near him, that I might be sure where he was, and above all that he was still. And I began to calculate the chances again—not for myself this time, but for the boy.

For in this, of course, I had the advantage of a dreadful experience. I seemed to know that Arnold Millard would strike down his man without fear of any consequences—without thought of any penalty he might have to pay. That done, he would walk out of the place, and would take his way through the streets, not caring greatly what happened to him. *I* had done that, ever so many years before; and therein I

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had been mistaken. I had walked straight into the arms of those who waited for me; I had not cared. But this boy *must* care; in a sense, he must be saved from himself. There was no one now that could guide him out of the labyrinth into which he had gone but myself; I only knew where the hammers were going, and where the scaffold was being built, with its black arm pointing to the grave; I only could meet him on that road, and from bitter experience turn him aside, and show him another secret road to travel—a road by which he might escape. I blessed God for my knowledge then.

In the dread silence of the room I found myself addressing the dead man; leaning over the table to look down at him fearfully, as though he could hear me.

"It may be that *you* will save him, after all," I whispered. "You have hidden yourself here—you are an unknown man; they cannot find out anything about you. If he is silent, it may happen that no one will ever suspect. But will he be silent?—that is the point. Or will he feel, in a cooler moment, that this deed cuts him off for ever from those for whose sake it was done. What will he do?"

Once again I found myself counting and calculating the chances—not for myself, but for another this time. In some strange fashion the boy must have tracked Murray Olivant to this place; must have struck him down; and must now be wandering, with that brand of Cain upon him, fighting the desperate battle with himself that a man must fight who has in one moment put himself outside the sphere of ordinary things; and so is hiding and dodging in a crowded world to escape.

I remembered that certain steamer tickets had been bought, in order to carry out that deception which had after all been useless; I knew that those tickets must be in the possession of the dead man. With the

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cowardice of one who puts off what he knows to be inevitable until the last moment, I searched everywhere for them about the room—looking on the mantelshelf, and in a small new portmanteau in the inner room—everywhere but where I knew instinctively they must be. Then at last, when there was nothing else to be done, I turned to the man himself, and knelt beside him.

Even as I did so I raised my head, and listened. The night was very still and windless; there was not a sound anywhere about the house. But I had distinctly heard the scrape of a footstep on the landing outside—that, and the movement of some one against the door. I got up very slowly and stealthily from my knees, and suddenly blew out the candle; then I felt my way to the door of the room, and stood listening again.

There was a small lobby outside this room, and at the further side of it the door leading to the staircase. While I stood there, I distinctly heard some one pressing against the door: heard the heavy breathing of some one who was evidently striving to peer through the keyhole. I stood perfectly still in the darkness, and listened; heard cautious footsteps moving away from the door, and then with greater confidence going more loudly down the stairs. And I knew instinctively that the murderer had been there, and had gone away again.

There had been a sudden thought in my mind for a moment that I would follow him; would overtake him, and so, coming face to face with him, make him understand that I knew the truth. With that understanding there might have come the knowledge that I was his friend, who had suffered just as he must be suffering now, and who was ready and willing to help him. But that thought was gone as quickly as it had

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come; I felt that I should only be met with furious denials; I knew that I must keep my knowledge to myself for the present.

It was difficult work going back into that room, and standing there fumbling to get a light. But I accomplished it at last, and once more went upon my knees beside the dead man, and began to fumble dreadfully in his pockets for the tickets. They were easily found, because the man seemed to have nothing else of any value in his pockets at all; he had carried out what he had promised, in that he had destroyed all marks of identification. So with the tickets in my hand I sat down on a chair (still keeping him well in view, lest he should dreadfully come to life again), and thought about what I had to do.

I fitted the thing together like a puzzle. Murray Olivant on the sea, on board the *Eaglet*; Murray Olivant so far accounted for, for some considerable time at least. On the other hand, Murray Olivant here as an unknown man—dead by an unknown hand. The first thing to be done obviously was to get rid of the tickets. For the present I thrust them into my own pocket, meaning to destroy them at the first opportunity.

Then I went carefully through the rooms, to be certain that there was nothing by which Olivant could be identified. I found, as I had expected, that there was no scrap of clothing anywhere that was marked; everything was of that newer cheaper kind that he had purchased for the better carrying out of his trick. I had left the most dreadful task to the last; and that was to examine the knife.

I had not the courage to pull it out; I took the candle from the table, and bent down to examine it. It was a knife not unlike that which I carried; it had been well worn, but was a powerful weapon, of the

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sort carried by sailors. I looked at it carefully, and was relieved to find that there were no distinguishing marks upon the handle: it was a common thing, such as the boy might have bought for a few shillings, just as I had bought the one that was slung about my waist.

I had done all that it was possible for me to do, and I now prepared for departure. I extinguished the candle, and got to the door; stood listening for a moment, in the fear that that visitor of a little time before might have returned, and might be waiting. But there was no sound, and after a moment or two I opened the door, and peered out. No one there, and the house wrapped in silence.

Emboldened by that, I pulled the door wide, and stepped out, and closed it behind me. I turned to put my hand against it, to be certain that it was fastened, and recoiled with a cry. For there was a man standing there, flat against the wall at one side of the door, looking at me. It was Jervis Fanshawe.

"What—what's the matter?" I asked hoarsely.

He grinned at me; his voice when he spoke was the mere thread of a whisper. "Nothing—nothing at all," he said. "How's our friend?" He jerked his head towards the closed door as he spoke.

"He—he's all right," I faltered, stooping to fumble with the lock for a moment, the better to hide my face. "Tired—gone to sleep."

Jervis Fanshawe moved away from me to the head of the stairs; peered over there down into the darkness below for a moment or two in silence. Then he turned swiftly, and laid his hand on my arm, and without looking at me began to pull me towards the stairs. "Come away," he whispered—"come away!"

I was halfway down the stairs before I realized what he meant, or what he thought. And then in a

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moment it flashed upon me that he knew in his own mind that Murray Olivant was dead, and believed that I had killed him. I had seen that thought growing in his mind when he had spoken to me about what my feelings must have been when I had killed Gavin Hockley; I knew now that the man was absolutely certain as to what had happened, and that he had fastened the crime upon me. For a moment I stopped on the stairs, and looked at him with a momentary feeling of dismay in my heart—momentary only, because the next instant I realized that this was, after all, the best thing that could happen. He might say or do anything, so far as I was concerned; it would be like flogging a dead man; my only dread had been that he might fasten the crime upon the right pair of shoulders.

"Why do you stare at me like that?" I asked.

"Was I staring?" he asked, with that grin again stealing over his features. "I was only thinking," he added; and then, dropping his voice to a whisper, he asked, as he glanced up the stairs towards the door we had left: "Tell me—does he sleep soundly?"

"I suppose so," I said hoarsely; and turned and went down the stairs, with Fanshawe following. He spoke no further words; as I strode on through the streets he came after me at a sort of trot—ever keeping a little behind me and at my elbow.

Knowing what I knew, and guessing that he had put that fearful interpretation upon my words, I found him presently to be a very ghost of a man, coming along always with that soft footfall just behind me. Once or twice I stopped on some pretext; but he always stopped too, and would not be shaken off. And so at last we came to that lodging down by the river, and were admitted by the girl Moggs. While we stood for a moment in the little dingy passage of the house,

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the girl jerked her head towards the stairs, and said, without looking at us—

"'E's up there."

Then she disappeared into her own quarters. I could not understand what she meant; I was puzzling my brains to know who could possibly have called upon us, or what fresh disaster this might mean, when I became aware of a sudden change that had come over my companion. He was leaning against the wall, mouthing and shivering, and plucking at his lips, and staring towards the staircase. I looked back at him, and called—

"What's wrong with you? What are you afraid of?"

He came towards me, edging along the wall of the passage until he could lay his hand upon mine and grip me. "Didn't you hear what she said?" he whispered. "He's up there—waiting for us! Don't you understand, you fool, that he'd come quicker than we could; didn't you think of that?"

The sheer terror in the man's face unnerved me; I found myself gripping him, as if I, too, had suddenly grown afraid.

"What the devil do you mean?" I whispered. "It's some chance caller. Don't be a fool!"

I was shaken to my very soul; but I went on up the stairs, looking back, to find him following more slowly. I saw that he was ready, at a chance word or gesture, to go tumbling down the stairs again, and screaming out into the night. I hesitated for a moment at the door of the room, and opened it, and went in. Standing before the cheerless hearth was the man Dawkins.

I glanced over my shoulder, to see a ghastly face coming round the door—a face that changed in a moment from terror to relief—from relief to a sort of

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childish rage. Jervis Fanshawe came into the room a little blusteringly, and scowled at the visitor.

"What do you want here at this time of night?" he demanded. "Startling people—and making them think—— What do you want?"

Dawkins stared at this hitherto humble man in some amazement. "Don't be insolent," he said at last. "I want to find Murray Olivant."

"What do you want with him?" snapped Jervis Fanshawe, before I could say a word. "And why do you seek him here?"

"Because I can't find him at his rooms," retorted Dawkins. "The place is shut up, and apparently deserted; even his servant has gone. What's the mystery?"

"There is no mystery," I said slowly. "Mr. Murray Olivant has gone on a voyage——"

"Yes, yes; on a voyage," corroborated Fanshawe eagerly. "That's true enough."

"He sails to-morrow on the *Eaglet*, bound for the Mediterranean," I went on. "I am to join him—to sail with him."

"Strange that I've heard nothing about it," muttered Dawkins, looking from one to the other of us. "I think I can guess what has happened, however; our friend has got hold of the girl, and is slipping away quietly with her—eh?"

"I couldn't say," said Fanshawe. "In any case, I wouldn't trouble about it, if I were you; it's not worth while."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Dawkins, with a grin. "Murray Olivant mustn't imagine for a moment that he is going to use me as he likes, and then fling me aside, without so much as a 'Thank you.' I don't believe in this sailing business; I don't believe he's going at all. There's some trick in this."

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"There's no trick," exclaimed Fanshawe eagerly. "He sails to-morrow, and Tinman here goes with him."

I confess I was a little surprised at this eager advocacy of my cause on the part of Fanshawe; I could not understand it. I firmly believed that he thought I had killed the man Olivant; but I should have imagined he was the last person to endeavour to shield me. Yet here he was carrying on that trick that had been practised on every one, and assisting me to hide Murray Olivant away. I could not understand it.

"Tell me one thing," persisted Dawkins. "Does he take the girl with him?"

I answered immediately: "No; he does not take her. He does not even know where she is, and he has decided to give up the whole business."

"I can't understand it, and I don't believe it," said Dawkins, moving towards the door. "You're hiding something from me."

I slipped my hand into my pocket, and drew out the envelope containing the steamer tickets. Without a word I pulled out the tickets, and showed them to him. "I am to meet my master early to-morrow morning with these, and to take him on board. Does that convince you?"

He looked at the tickets and at me; something in my manner evidently impressed him. "Well," he said, "it's no affair of mine—and he was always an erratic sort of fellow. But why couldn't he have let me know that he was going?"

"You forget," I reminded him, "that you have been endeavouring to get a large sum of monep out of him."

"There's something in that," he replied, with a laugh. "I don't like being made a fool of; I hope the infernal vessel will blow up, or sink, or something, with the pair of you on board."

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"Thank you, sir," I responded quietly, as he went out, slamming the door after him.

Jervis Fanshawe was seated on the bed, rubbing his hands, and laughing softly to himself. "That was well done, Charlie; that was excellently done," he said, in a hoarse whisper. "You're a clever fellow, Charlie; you've covered up the traces beautifully."

"I don't understand you," I replied coldly. "There are no traces to cover up, beyond those we know already. Murray Olivant is in hiding——"

"That's it—in hiding," he whispered, nodding his head many times, and sucking in his lips, and rubbing his long bony hands together. "In hiding's the word. And he'll sleep soundly to-night—won't he, Charlie?"

"I imagine so," I replied, looking at him steadily. "Why do you insist upon that point?"

"Do I insist upon it, Charlie?" he asked innocently. "Not at all—not at all. Only I like to think of him in those snug rooms of his in Lincoln's Inn Fields—sleeping well—sleeping as long as he likes, Charlie—eh?"

There was that between us which seemed to make it necessary that my eyes should seek his, and that his should be fastened on mine. Even when I moved round the room, I saw that his eyes followed me. And I knew what was in his mind. I would not trust him; I would never trust him again; for the sake of the boy who had done this thing in a moment of madness, I must let Fanshawe think what he would.

"We'd better sleep," I said, as I turned the key in the door. "And, as for Murray Olivant—let him sleep."

"Quite right, Charlie—we can leave him—to sleep soundly," he said, nodding his head at me. "He's safe enough."

He stretched himself on the bed, and seemed to fall

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asleep at once. I had curled myself up in a corner, and was slowly nodding to slumber, when I thought he moved; I asked sleepily if he wanted anything. There was no reply, and the only sound in the room was his steady breathing. I decided sleepily that everything might well wait until the morrow; my head dropped forward on my breast, and I slept heavily.

I had no recollection of anything during the night, save that it seemed to me once that some one touched me, and that I fretfully begged to be left alone. But I awoke in the morning to find the bed unoccupied, and only myself in the room. Fanshawe was gone. I wondered about it a little, and yet was relieved to be rid of him.

I had got clearly in my mind what I was to do. I wanted to know that Barbara and the girl were safe at Hammerstone Market; I wanted to be certain that the girl was back again in her father's house. Always when I got to that point I stopped, and my thoughts refused to travel further. For while Murray Olivant was safely out of the way, never to trouble the child's peace again, there always came on top of that the shuddering remembrance that the boy had killed him, and that only afterwards, if he was the boy I knew him to be, would there come upon him the knowledge that with that knife thrust he had killed not only Murray Olivant, but all hope of any love story with Barbara. That was one of the problems I had to solve; to know what the boy would do.

I was certain in my own mind that Barbara, at least, would keep her promise to me, and would take the girl to Hammerstone Market. It seemed at once to become vitally necessary that I should see Barbara—should let her understand, in however vague a fashion, what had happened, and should get the clear light of her reason upon it. Up to a certain point I had taken

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my way strongly, without fear and without question; but now I had come to a point when I was afraid to move—afraid to take any step that might involve young Arnold Millard. One man I feared, and feared greatly; and that man was Jervis Fanshawe.

I knew he would not hesitate for a moment to denounce me, if it served his purpose to do so. I knew that he believed that I had killed Murray Olivant, and I did not know how far that old vengeance with which he had pursued me before would stir him to pursue me again. I did not like, above all things, that secret creeping away in the night on some unknown errand.

Not that I feared for myself; but that I thought I knew enough of the boy to know that, if another were threatened with the penalty of his crime, he would not hesitate to step forward and tell the truth. And in that case all that I had striven so hard to do would be lost, and the boy's fate would be that of a certain poor Charlie Avaline, long since forgotten.

I hurried to Barbara's lodging, only to find, as I had anticipated, that she and the girl had gone. From there I went straight to the railway station, and took train for Hammerstone Market—still with that feeling in my mind that I must know, before everything else, what the boy was going to do.

In the train I remembered that the vessel on which Murray Olivant was supposed to sail with me started that morning; I wondered what was going to happen in that direction, or whether it was already known that we had not sailed at all. The thought of that sent my hand to my pocket in search of the tickets; I found that they were gone.

I searched every pocket wildly, striving as I did so to remember exactly when I had had them last, and under what circumstances. I remembered distinctly taking them from the pocket of the dead man and

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putting them into my own; knew—or thought I knew—that I had had them at the time when Dawkins doubted my statement about Olivant. But had I produced them then for his inspection, or had I merely told him that I had them? I could not be sure of that; I went over and over the conversation of the previous night, only to find myself more and more muddled and vague about it. One dreadful thought came to me: had I by any chance dropped them in that room in Lincoln's Inn Fields where Murray Olivant lay murdered?

I was making my way out of the station, when I felt a quick touch on my arm; I looked round sharply, and saw young Arnold Millard beside me. I suppose my face must have shown in a moment the fear that was in my heart for him, and for his safety; but there was a fine assumption of astonishment in his tones when he spoke to me.

"Why, Tinman, what's the matter with you?" he demanded. "You look as if you'd seen a ghost. What's wrong?"

"What should be wrong, sir?" I asked, as we walked together out of the station. "Have you any news of your brother—of Mr. Olivant?" I looked at him fully, and wondered that his eyes did not shrink from mine.

"The best of news," he exclaimed. "He's shown the white feather, Tinman; he's made up his mind to leave the country. I'm not sorry that he's slipped through my fingers; he wasn't worth killing, was he?"

"No; God knows he wasn't worth killing," I said passionately.

"His flat is shut up, and I'm told he sails this morning; the people in the house even knew the name of the vessel—the *Eaglet*. I wouldn't believe it at first,

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but the housekeeper opened the doors for me, and let me go all over the rooms. Everything was packed up or covered up; he's going to be away a long time, I should think."

I wondered how he could lie in such a cheerful fashion; my heart ached at the thought that I had sacrificed myself for such a man as this. Of course, I understood that he had a right to protect himself, and to suspect every one who might by any possibility guess his secret; but I would have given anything then to have heard one word from him that even hinted at the truth—to have seen in his eyes the faintest suggestion of fear. I began to understand that in the event of Murray Olivant being identified, that faithful servant Tinman might well hang, after all, for what he had not done.

"And so I've come down here, to see if I can get any news of poor Barbara," he went on. "I've a shrewd suspicion that I may hear something of her; I don't think Murray would have bolted like that, unless he had found that the game was up, do you?

"Miss Barbara is down here—with her father," I said.

He turned to me quickly. "How do you know that?" he asked in surprise.

"I know it—that is all," I said.

Presently he found my slow steps too slow for his impatience; he excused himself, and hurried away at a great rate in the direction of the house, leaving me walking more slowly in his wake, and looking sadly after him. For this was different from anything I had anticipated; this was but a mean slipping-out of the business, with nothing heroic about it. I felt sorry for the child who was to trust her life to him.

It was with a great sense of relief that, as I came

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nearer to the house, I met the elder Barbara. She stopped for a moment on seeing me, and then came towards me rapidly, with her hands clasped at her breast, looking at me. Only then did I remember, miserably enough, on what errand I had set out when last I had seen her, and with what threat on my lips. I realized that my troubles were not over.

"My dear, you have news for me?" she whispered, looking straight into my eyes. "Tell me everything."

"First tell me if you have seen the boy—young Millard?"

"Yes, I've seen him; he's happy enough now. I saw him go to Barbara; there seemed a perfect understanding between them in a moment. They trust each other so completely."

"They trust each other so completely," I replied mechanically. "Well—perhaps that is well. Now for my news, Barbara. What would you wish me to tell you?"

"The truth," she whispered, still looking at me intently.

I thought of the boy, with the brand of Cain upon him, who was at that moment doubtless holding the child of this Barbara in his arms, and whispering that he loved her; and she trusted him so completely! "You want the truth?" I responded with a smile. "Then I have no news for you."

She took me in her arms—there, in that quiet country lane; she spoke to me, as I knew, out of the depth of her great love for me. "The truth, Charlie—the truth to me, at least," she pleaded.

I saw that it had come once again to the parting of the ways for us, just as it had done twenty years before; I knew that for the boy's sake, and for the sake of the girl who loved him, I must again thrust

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myself out of life. For I must lie to this woman, who held me in her arms and pleaded for the truth. And in giving her that which she must for ever believe to be the truth, I must wound her again, as I had wounded her long ago. "You shall know the truth," I said slowly—"if you will promise to do what I ask. Promise."

"I will promise anything—and everything."

"I went away from you, meaning to kill Murray Olivant," I said, like one repeating a lesson. "You should know that I do not fail in such a matter. I have killed him." She clapped her hand upon my lips, and looked round her quickly; I took the hand, and drew it away, and kissed it, and went on with what I had to say. "All the world believes that he sails this morning for the Mediterranean; it is possible that the murder will not be discovered. That's the truth."

She clung to me, shuddering; she asked me in a whisper what it was that I wanted her to do.

"Go back to your husband," I said. "It is not he that needs you, so much as the girl. She needs you more than she ever needed you in her life before. Will you keep your promise to me?"

"Yes," she said in a whisper, as her arms fell to her sides—"I will go back to him."

She turned away, and left me standing there, looking after her as she went.

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CHAPTER XII

THE HAUNTED MAN

WHILE I stood there in that country lane, looking after the woman who was going from me for the last time, I had time for many thoughts. For now I stood in the world more absolutely alone than I had ever been; there was no hand I could touch again in friendship, for even this dear hand that I loved most of all was withheld from me. I had killed a man once, long ago; it was my strange fate to take the place of another man who had killed his fellow—to bear the blame for that, even in the eyes of the woman I loved—to suffer death for it, if necessary.

So much I owed to my memories—so much I owed to the new Barbara, and to the boy who loved her, and whom I must save from the fate that had befallen a certain Charlie Avaline.

But a strange thing was to happen—something showing the very irony of Fate—before I left that old life behind me for ever. Some mad desire to see again these people for whom, in a sense, I was laying down my life—or so much of it as mattered—came upon me; I went on, unsteadily and hesitatingly, towards the house. It was a bleak winter day, with a rough and surly wind playing havoc with the dead leaves in the grounds, and whirling them up in clouds, and tossing them upon the terrace, and against the windows. As I pushed open the gate—to look into that

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place of my dreams for the last time—I saw a little picture before me that seemed, as it were, to round off all that had happened there, or all that might happen in the future.

I saw young Arnold Millard and the girl standing, arm in arm; the girl's disengaged hand was stretched out to the woman who was her mother. That elder Barbara seemed to be saying something to them both, and pointing to the house. The girl was smiling; and suddenly she turned, and drew the elder woman towards the terrace, with the boy following. Scarcely knowing what I did, I crept through the neglected garden, and went towards the terrace after them; they did not turn their heads, and they did not see me.

I knew, of course, that the woman who was supposed to have died so many years before was but keeping her promise to me, and was on her way to confront her husband. I felt that I must know what happened—must understand under what circumstances, whether of possible happiness or of misery, I left her. I crept nearer until, as the girl and Arnold Millard opened the narrow door at the end of the terrace, and passed into that room I knew so well, I was close at hand. The elder Barbara waited outside, looking into the room, and evidently hesitating what to do. I was within a dozen yards of her.

Inside the room I saw Lucas Savell seated; the girl was on her knees beside him, talking to him. In the silence I heard her voice quite clearly.

"Dear father—only a good, kind friend, who has been almost like a mother to me—who has helped and protected me. I want you to see her."

Even as Lucas Savell feebly got to his feet, and stared in bewilderment at his daughter, I understood

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that Barbara had not told her child of the relationship between them; that was to be left for the moment when she should greet her husband. The elder Barbara had passed through the doorway, and was now inside the room; Lucas Savell was still staring in a dazed fashion at his daughter.

"I—I don't understand," I heard him say.

The elder woman stepped forward into the room. "Lucas!—Lucas Savell!" she said falteringly; and stood still.

I was totally unprepared for what happened; it was all over in a mere matter of seconds. Savell swung round quickly, with a cry, and then took a step towards the woman who stood just within the doorway of the room; cried out her name in a terrible voice, and dropped to his knees—

"Barbara! Oh!—my God!—Barbara!"

She made a swift movement towards him; I saw him put up his hands, as though he would beat her off; then he plunged forward on his face at her feet. The girl was the first to reach him, and she raised him, and called to him wildly. But he hung limply in her arms.

"Father!—you called me, father!"

He slowly raised his head; I saw his mouth open, the while he made a frantic effort to speak; he even smiled, and seemed to try to raise himself in the girl's arms. As the elder woman moved towards him, he shrank away from her, with horror written in every line of his face, and seemed to dread that she might touch him; when she did, in order to assist the girl to raise him, it was curious to see the way in which he looked at her, like a dumb stricken thing that did not understand. By that time I was in the room, and my presence seemed to stir young Millard at once to action.

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"I'll go and get a doctor," he said. "He's had a stroke."

The elder woman and I contrived to get him upstairs to his room, assisted by the woman who acted as servant in the house. And while we moved him he strove always to keep his eyes fixed on the wife who had so mysteriously come back to him from the grave; he watched her incessantly. More than once he contrived to move a hand, to touch hers; and again that puzzled expression would come over his face. Now and then, too, his mouth would slowly open, in that effort to speak, and then would close again.

The doctor came at last, and very gravely shook his head; muttered something to the boy about old habits and Time's revenges; predicted that the man might live for a long time, or might die at any moment. "One thing is very certain," said the doctor, as he pulled on his gloves—"he'll never speak again."

There was nothing that I could do there, and there was work waiting for me in London. I felt that I must not then leave ragged ends; I must settle firmly upon my shoulders the burden I had taken up. I whispered to the elder Barbara that I was going; she came with me out of the house, and only left me at the gate.

"This is the end for us, Charlie," she said; and yet she spoke quite bravely. "My place is here, and I shall not leave him again. I come here as the unknown woman—the friend of my own child; for he will never be able to say who I am, and I shall never tell any one on my own account. And you, my dear"—she wound her fingers about mine for a moment, and looked at me with the old steadfast look—"what will you do—alone?"

"I don't know, Barbara," I said. "I shall go

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back, to meet whatever fate is in store for me—and it does not really matter, after all. I have been greatly blessed; I have seen the dear woman I love again, and I hold her hands now; and I once looked upon a dreary world that held her not, because she was supposed to be dead. And the child you love is near you, and happiness beckons her with a sure hand. It might have been ever so much worse, Barbara."

"If it should never happen that we meet again, Charlie, let it at least be understood that I have forgotten and forgiven and understood all that you have done," she said. "And now good-bye—good-bye—for the last time!"

I did not dare to look back, although I knew that she stood there, watching me as I went. It might have unnerved me had I seen her again; and I had need of all my nerve for what was before me. I got to the station, and once more took train for London. For I felt that, in the first place, I must solve the mystery of the steamer tickets.

I blamed myself bitterly that I had not destroyed them, as I had first intended. The thought that they had got into other hands, or had even been dropped by me in that closed room in Lincoln's Inn Fields, haunted me; I seemed to see them found, and inquiries made about them; and so a gradual tracing back, to find a certain Mr. Murray Olivant who should have sailed on the *Eaglet*. I had two causes for dread: the one, so far as Jervis Fanshawe was concerned, because I knew that he believed I had killed Olivant; the second, as regarded the boy, because I feared that he would not hesitate to fling the blame upon me, if it happened that he was driven into a tight corner. And, above all things, I wanted to know what had happened behind the door of that

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room in Lincoln's Inn Fields, or if any discovery had yet been made.

When I got to London I found myself in the position again of that poor Charlie Avaline who had wandered about with the shadow of murder hanging over him, watching for newspaper placards. I scanned each one I came across, expecting every moment to see a flaring headline that should seem to point directly to me; but I saw nothing.

I bought a morning paper, thinking that it might be possible for something to be in that; but again I saw nothing. And then it struck me that, even if the body had not been found yet, I might be running my neck into the noose if I went back to those rooms, and was discovered there. I remembered horribly enough that I had a key of the outer door, and that the only other keys were doubtless in the pocket of the dead man. And yet I must go back there—I must know what had happened, or if anything had yet been discovered.

Exactly how many times I walked up and down the stones of Lincoln's Inn Fields, and round about the neighbourhood, I should not like to say. For I knew that behind the windows of one particular set of rooms that I could see from the pavement on the opposite side there lay a dead man; and already some one might have been hammering at the door of those rooms—might even have beaten it in, and cried out what was there for all men to see. Twice I actually walked to the door of the house, and twice turned back, for no better reason than that a clerk or a whistling office boy marched in at the door, and began to climb the stairs to some office above. Once, as I stood there irresolutely, a policeman sauntered along towards me; stopped for a moment to look in at the doorway of the house, and then turned his

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back and stood there, staring at the cab rank opposite, as though waiting. Sick and faint, I hurried away, and went again on that round I had taken so many times already.

It was dark, and the lamps had long been lighted, and the last clerks and office boys had dashed out of the various doorways, with letters for post, or intent upon trains to be caught, when at last I summoned up courage to creep in at that doorway, and to begin to climb the stairs. Even then I looked back, again and again; paused as I got to each landing, with the absolute certainty in my own mind that some one was following me stealthily. Once, as I stopped like that, a door was flung open within a yard of me, and a man, after staring at me for a moment, slammed the door, and raced off down the stairs. Almost I think I shrieked after him to stop, and to listen to what I had to say. But that shriek was only, fortunately for me, in my own imagination.

I reached the door at last; it seemed that I had been travelling for hours to get to it. I listened intently for a minute or two; then I slipped my key into the lock, and opened the door. The little lobby in which I stood after I had closed that outer door was in complete darkness; for a second or two I know that I stood there afraid to open the door of the inner room, and yet afraid to remain where I was.

I opened the door at last, and stepped in boldly. You may perhaps have some faint idea of what my feelings were when I saw that the candle standing on the table was alight, and the whole room flooded with the glow from it!

I know that I stood for quite half a minute, staring at the thing stupidly, and wondering what had happened, or if I were going mad. I had found the outer door locked, and now, when I was in the room, a death-

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like silence reigned; yet here was the candle alight. When at last I mustered courage to take a step or two into the place, and to look round the corner of the table, I think I fully expected to see the man with the knife in him gone, and to know, in some horrible fashion, that he was in that inner room, waiting for me. It took me a long time, even after I had seen him lying there, with that stiff hand still gripping the hilt of the knife, to realize that he was dead, and that he could not possibly have lighted the candle. Even in the horror of that moment, when it dawned upon me slowly and dreadfully that some one else was hidden in those rooms, I know that I laughed softly at the absurdity of the notion that the dead man could have lighted the candle.

There was no sound in the place—no movement of any kind. The chambers were very small—just the lobby outside, and the little sitting-room, and a bedroom beyond. The lobby was empty; the sitting-room contained only the dead man and myself; whoever was there must be in the bedroom beyond. I began to form conjectures as to who might be hidden there—going over in my mind this one and that, who might by any possibility b interested in this matter, or in me. Once, as I watched the door of that inner room, there was a mad feeling in my mind that I would blow out the candle, and make a bolt for it; for the door of the bedroom was closed, and whoever was there could not have seen me. Finally I did nothing at all, but just to stand very still, wondering what I should do. In those few minutes I seemed to live a lifetime—to touch the depths of hope and fear, and life and death, and even madness.

My horror was not decreased by seeing the door of the bedroom begin slowly to open. It took a long time; because whoever was opening that door half repented

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of their purpose more than once. For the door would jerk an inch or two open, and then an inch or two back, and then would close again entirely —and all this quite noiselessly. The thing was getting on my nerves to that extent that I know I was on the verge of screaming out, when I saw a hand grasp the lintel of the doorway—a thin bony hand, that gripped the wood tenaciously. Then the door flew open with startling suddenness, and a face—ghastly white, and with a dropping jaw—was thrust out into the room—the face of Jervis Fanshawe.

Even while he stared at me, I found it suddenly necessary that I should rearrange all my ideas. Jervis Fanshawe had not entered into my considerations at all in regard to the murder. I had fixed inevitably upon Arnold Millard—had followed in imagination his every action in the matter; had reasoned out why he should do this or that to the point of actual certainty. And here, in these rooms that I had left locked, was Jervis Fanshawe, whom by no possibility could I believe had had anything to do with the matter. I leaned upon the table, and stared at him; and after a moment or two he came slowly out into the room.

He was so afraid of me, and so appalled at the fact of my coming there at all, that he came slowly towards me, never taking his eyes from my face, and looking at nothing else. It was only when, horribly enough, he stumbled over the feet of the dead man, that he jumped back with a cry, and seemed to recover himself. Then he looked at me again, and over his face stole a smile.

"Why, Charlie—what's wrong?" he whispered; and the whisper seemed to shatter the silences of the place, and to bring us both back in a moment to the hard and stern realities of things.

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"How did you get in here?" I demanded.

He did not answer in words; he stared down at the dead man for a moment or two, and while he did so he fumbled in his pockets. Very slowly he drew out something that jingled; still looking at the dead man, he dropped on the table the three keys, tied together with a piece of black tape. I recognized them in a moment as the keys that had been given me when I first paid for the rooms.

He looked at me as though he did not understand the question; looked again at the keys. Then he pointed to the dead man—and I understood. It seemed then as though some extraordinary process went on in my mind, so that old carefully constructed ideas were hurled out of it, and new ones hastily formed. I gasped, and looked at Fanshawe, and looked at the keys; then I cried out at him.—

"My God!—you?"

He nodded slowly; it seemed as though he stood there, thinking about something else, and only coming back slowly and with difficulty to the situation he had to face. When at last he began to speak, it was at first in a slow dull whisper, like a man talking to himself, and not realizing that another is listening. It was only later, after the first moment or two, that he began, as it were, to take me into his confidence.

"She seemed to call to me to do it. You remember when she went past me like a spirit in the dark garden—the night we knew the girl was in peril; I first thought of it then. I put it aside for a time; I never had any real courage for such a matter as this. Then I saw the spirit of her again in London here—that Barbara we both had loved, and who died years and years ago. And then I knew clearly enough what I had to do."

He stopped, and looked down at the dead man;

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it seemed almost as though he went on talking to that ghastly thing that lay at his feet.

"I don't think I killed you out of any real hatred of you; it was only because I was afraid for myself. I saw that you, if only with your lips and your lying tongue, would harm this child, just as another man long ago had harmed the Barbara who was dead; and I felt that you would have to die for it, just as that other man had died. I did not kill you because I was afraid of what you might do; I killed you to save my own soul. Yes—that was it; to save my own soul."

He had been speaking very slowly, and quite without emotion; but now his manner suddenly changed, and he turned to me, and gripped my arm, and went on speaking eagerly, in a pathetic, wistful desire to make me understand.

"Yes, Charlie—I saw in that the only way to atone. Look at me, Charlie: an old man that has suffered, and behind whom lie so many years that are broken and unhallowed, and worse than useless. I felt that some day—quite soon—I might be called to meet my God; and that there—radiant, as we knew her years ago, Charlie, in her young and innocent beauty—there might rise up against me the woman we both loved. She's dead, but she had nothing to fear from death. I knew that when *I* died it would be different; there were accusing eyes that would spring alive with old fires to stare at me—accusing hands that would point at me out of the darkness into which I was going. And I prayed, or tried to pray, that God would show me some way—some sacrifice to be offered up in the old Bible fashion—that should atone. I pushed that thought away from me more than once—the thought of killing him; but I could not get rid of it. It was always with me—and that was why I tried to learn from

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you, who had done the thing once, what it was like, and how best to set about it. For I felt that if I could kill this man—if I could cry to the uneasy spirit of the dead woman—'This have I done to make atonement; this man have I killed, who would have harmed the child so like yourself in the old years that are gone'—why, then I felt that all would be well for me, and that I should not see always her accusing eyes in the darkness, or in my dreams when I slept."

I stared at him for what seemed a long time; it was difficult at first for my mind to grasp this thing, to realize what he had done. At last I asked: "Why have you come back here?"

"I could not stay away," he whispered. "I wanted to know what had happened—whether they had found him; I was even afraid that the blow might not have been strong enough, and that he might have crept out—bloody and horrible—to cry out what had been done, and to tell men who had done it. It has taken me a long time to get back here; I've been afraid."

"What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going away—far away," he said, looking at me cunningly. "I haven't your courage, Charlie; I couldn't face what they might do to me if they found out anything about it. When I was coming here first to kill him I did not think of that; but now I can't bear even to try to understand in my own mind what the rope would be like about my neck—and the cap pulled over me—and the grey morning shut out—and then—— No—no—I can't bear to think of that. I shall escape."

"I think you possibly may escape unsuspected," I assured him gravely. "I do not think there is any one likely to point a finger at you, and suggest that you did it."

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"You think not, Charlie?" His voice was eager, and something very like a smile was on his face. "Do you think I might get away? I think so too; I'm going to try. And when you come to think of it, Charlie," he went on, with rising spirits—"it was bravely done—finely done. For I'm a weak old man—see these thin hands and arms of mine—and he full of life and vigour. Yet look at him now."

"Tell me how you did it," I said.

"It was after I had talked to you, Charlie—when I spoke about a knife, you know—that I made up my mind how best it could be done. I bought the knife—a long way from here, where no one would be likely to know me—and I chose the very night of his coming here. It was a simple matter, after all. I came up the stairs, and knocked at the door; after a moment or two he opened it, cursed me for disturbing him, and went in, with his back to me. The knife was in my breast pocket, and I had my hand upon it; I could have done it then—easily. But I was afraid; I did not know where to strike. Then, when he came into the room, and I was there with him, he suddenly turned round, and asked me what I wanted. And courage came back to me. I stepped up close to him, and I said suddenly that this was what I wanted; and I drove it in with all my force. He stood staring at me for quite a moment, with that thing sticking in him—staring stupidly, as if he didn't understand what had happened. And then he laughed (or so it seemed to me), and dropped, and died. It was horrible."

"And then?"

"It suddenly occurred to me that I might need to come back here again; I must have that power, at least. I did not dare go near him; but I found that he had dropped the keys on the table, just where they are now. So I took them—and I went away."

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I picked up the keys, and looked at them; I was thinking deeply. For now it seemed to me that I had to face a new problem: the problem of what this man Jervis Fanshawe would do. That he would not give himself up for the crime I was certain; but I wanted to understand whether he had determined, in the event of discovery, to shift the blame on the boy Arnold Millard, or on myself. I had suffered once for this man, twenty years before—had been drawn on to murder, practically at his bidding; I did not mean to play the scapegoat again. In the case of the boy it had been different; while I had believed him guilty I had been willing enough, out of that old romantic feeling, to take the burden on my own shoulders. But not for Jervis Fanshawe.

"What are you going to do now?" I asked for the second time. "What plans have you in your mind?"

He looked at me again, with that cunning expression on his face I had seen before. "There is a vessel to sail, on which Murray Olivant took passages for himself and for you," he said in a whisper. "What if I took his place, Charlie—and you came with me?"

"Too late," I said—"even if you had the tickets."

Still keeping his eyes fixed upon my face, he dived into one of his pockets, and brought out an envelope; opened it, and pulled out the tickets. I started, and stared at him, and made a movement to take them from him; but he closed the envelope quickly, and thrust it back into his pocket.

"Ah!—you didn't know that, did you?" he said. "I stole them from you while you slept; I saw my chance there. It only occurred to me, after I had seen you show them to Dawkins, that I might slip away like that, and never be heard of again; I might drop off at some foreign port, and be lost."

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"You're too late," I reminded him, with a laugh. "The *Eaglet* sailed this morning."

"You're wrong," he exclaimed, dragging the envelope out again. "Either you made a mistake in the date, or the clerk did; the *Eaglet* sails to-morrow morning."

"Are you sure?" I asked in amazement.

For answer he carefully pulled the tickets out, and, keeping a grip on them, let me read the date. Sure enough some one had blundered, for the date was that of the following day.

"Now, Charlie," he whispered, laying an impressive hand on my arm—"the way is clear. Come with me, Charlie—Tinman, the servant, travelling with Murray Olivant. Murray Olivant is expected on board, and his passage is taken; Tinman, his servant, goes with him. As for this thing that lies here"—he jerked his head to indicate the dead man—"who is ever to say that this is Murray Olivant. A chance, Charlie; but all the world is made up of chances, isn't it? Come, Charlie—the road lies clear before us."

"No," I said—"I have other work to do. If you can escape, do so by all means; I will not leave England."

He got his hat from that inner room, and prepared to depart. I had put the keys back on the table, and I saw him eyeing them; I took the key I had from my pocket, and dropped it with the others. "It's a great game of chance," I whispered to him, "and you may never be discovered, after all. Come away—and leave him there; you are safe so far as I am concerned."

He went to the door and opened it; at a sign from me he waited at that outer door, to be certain that no one was about. Then I blew out the candle, and crept out to join him; and for a moment we stood

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close together, listening. Then he opened the door, and slipped out, and I came after him. I pulled the door, and heard the lock click; and knew that the ghastly thing inside was safely shut in, until some one should break down the door, and find it.

We stood for a moment or two listening, and then crept down into the quiet of Lincoln's Inn Fields. As our feet touched the pavement Jervis Fanshawe stopped, and looked over his shoulder back into the dark house.

"Don't you hear anything, Charlie?" he whispered.

"Nothing," I replied. "What should we hear?"

"No door opening quietly?—no soft pad, pad of feet down the stairs? Quick!—don't you hear it?"

"Come away," I said abruptly; for the horror of the thing was creeping over me again.

Yet before we were out of the place he had turned—not once but many times—to look over his shoulder, whispering to me more than once that something was creeping along the other side—there—in the shadow of the railings!—and didn't I see that hand against the breast, gripping something?—and was I sure that the door had been closed?—and would it not be better if we went back, and listened again outside it?

We were well on our way back to his lodging when he stopped, and gripped me, and cried out suddenly that the candle had been left alight; he was sure of it—sure that some one would see it shining through the chinks of the door. But that I gripped him firmly he would have set off then and there, perhaps to burst into the place in some mad fashion, to see what had happened. But I got him back to his lodging, and saw him presently stretched upon the bed, muttering and moaning to himself, and starting up every now and then to ask me if there wasn't a

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footstep on the stairs, or a hand knocking at the door.

But in the morning he was calmer, and I made him as respectable as possible, and took him down presently to the docks. There we found the *Eaglet*, in the midst of much bustle and excitement, getting ready to start; and I sent him on board, and left him there. The last I saw of him was when the vessel was moving away into the river, and I was standing at the dock side, watching. And Jervis Fanshawe was leaning over the side, with that nervous hand of his plucking at his lips, and with his haunted eyes staring straight through me and behind me, as though at the last he saw Murray Olivant, with the knife in his breast, rushing to stop him.

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CHAPTER XIII

I FACE THE WORLD AGAIN

OF all that I must write of my life, as it faced me after those tragic happenings, certain pictures rise up in my mind, not easily to be effaced. I who write this am poor and old, yet not broken nor downcast any more. For, by the great grace of God, I am not alone; there is one with me, whose tender loving eyes look always at me, with no remembrance of any defects or frailties—with no recollection of anything I may have done that would have been so much better left undone.

Of the pictures that rise before me as I look back, the first is that of being absolutely alone in London, with the fear of death upon me. The fear of death —because the man Jervis Fanshawe had killed lay hidden behind a frail wooden door, that might at any moment be broken down; thereafter I was to expect search to be made for a certain servant named Tinman, sometime Charles Avaline, condemned to death twenty years before for murder.

Yet, strangely enough, that never happened. I have the memory before me now of a day when I walked the streets, and was faced suddenly by a newspaper placard, flaring with the announcement—"Murder of an unknown man in Lincoln's Inn Fields." Thereafter I saw other placards—this one startlingly vivid with a clue, this one hopeless. And I even had the temerity

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to stand in a little stuffy Coroner's court, what time twelve good men and true brought in a verdict of murder against some person or persons unknown. More than that, I stood one bitter winter evening beside a pauper grave in a cemetery, and knew that the newly turned earth covered all that was mortal of Murray Olivant.

Another picture rises in my mind—so near to the other that it seems to be part of it. I remember that on this occasion I was in a poor eating-house in a poor neighbourhood of London; I was looking through the columns of a newspaper that was a day or two old. A man as poor as I was is necessarily a little behind the times; news filters through to him slowly enough. And looking down the columns of this paper I came across an item of news that was startling:—

"Loss of a British steamer. *Only one survivor.*—The s.s. *Eaglet*, concerning the fate of which so many rumours have been rife of late, is now known to have gone on the rocks off Ushant, and to have become a total wreck. The fate of the vessel would probably never have been known, but for the fact that a sailor was washed ashore, and after being tended by the good people there, was able to give some particulars as to the wreck. It appears that the vessel went on the rocks in one of those dense fogs peculiar to that coast, and broke up within a very few minutes. There is not the slightest doubt that this sailor, whose name is given as Henry Howard, is the sole survivor of the ill-fated vessel. It may be mentioned that among the passengers was a young gentleman of fortune—a Mr. Murray Olivant—who was travelling to the Mediterranean on a pleasure cruise."

I sat with the soiled paper in my hands; I read so

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much more into the paragraph than any one else could have done. The real Murray Olivant lay in that pauper's grave beside which I had stood, and yet was buried as a man unknown; and here he was proclaimed as having been lost in the wreck of the vessel on which he was supposed to have sailed. More than that; for the hungry sea had claimed as a victim that man Jervis Fanshawe of the haunted eyes, who had killed him, and had gone on that voyage in his place. Justice has a long arm.

My memories after that are confused; I think I must have suffered greatly during that winter, when I was alone and friendless in London. In my recollections of that time there is always a great roar and rush of traffic in my ears, and I seem always to be standing in the rain, or with the bitter wind ruffling my garments; at other times I am crouching over fires in small lodging houses, in the company of other forlorn wretches—outcasts like myself. I am always hungry, and I do not seem to understand what reason I have for living at all. And I find myself, like some uneasy ghost that has been forgotten, wandering about old familiar places, and going over again scenes that only I remember, and that belong only to the past.

I find myself again in Lincoln's Inn Fields—unable now to remember clearly where a certain Gavin Hockley is—or whether I killed him, or someone else; wondering vaguely what he had to do with a certain Murray Olivant who died long ago—or was he drowned at sea? I find myself—an old man, with the rain beating upon me, and the wind driving at me—sitting on the steps of a house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and wondering if I dare climb the stairs, to find what is hidden behind a locked door.

Another picture rises in my mind: I am in a great

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clean place of many beds, and I am ill. They talk of want and exposure, and then try to find out who I am, and whether I have any friends. I remember one thing, and one only: that my name is "Tinman"; I am glad to think that I have no friends, and that it may happen that this is the end of my poor life, and that I may finish here in peace.

But the spring comes, and with the spring some stirring of life in my veins. I am so much better that I surprise them all; although they cannot understand why I refer to myself, over and over again, as "No. 145." I beg that they will call me that, because it is what I have been for twenty years. And I ask again and again that the governor will not send me out into a world that I have forgotten, and where I know no one.

But the spring in my blood fights for me, after all; and I am presently free, and a little grateful, perhaps, to be able to sit in the sun, and watch the great glad life of a great glad city all about me. And this is the last of the pictures—for all the rest is dear reality.

I remember that, as I grew stronger, a sudden passion of longing came upon me, and drew me inevitably to the woods and the fields I had known so long before, in a certain summer time, and had known later with the snow upon them, and the chill winds of winter blowing over them. The sun warmed me to life almost as if I had renewed my youth, so that I found myself one day—poor shabby old creature that I was—with my feet set steadily upon the road that led to Hammerstone Market, and with my eager eyes searching the landscape before me to catch the first glimpse of it.

I was weaker than I had imagined, and it took me nearly two days to get to it. But I came to it at last, on a bright spring morning—came into the familiar

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bustle of the little country town, with the market-place just as it had always been, and the *George Hotel* as comfortable-looking as ever, with its doors thrown hospitably wide open. I was tired and faint after my long tramp, and I found in a corner of a pocket in my shabby clothes a sixpence. I went into the place, and ordered some bread and cheese and ale.

There seemed some excitement about the *George* that morning. There was an air of every one being in their best clothes; there was a young coachman there, in particular, who was obviously smoking an unusual cigar, and who had a white favour fastened to the lapel of his coat. There was another coachman also, more elderly and staid; and the two men were talking with the landlord. I passed unnoticed—a mere shabby stranger, taking his modest refreshment in the corner.

"Well, an' it won't be half a bad thing to see the old place livened up a bit," the landlord was saying. "They do say that the young chap 'as come into a tidy bit o' money since 'is 'alf-brother was drowned in that wreck—a very tidy bit o' money indeed. Well—well—that's the way o' the world: 'ere to day an' gorn to-morrow."

"I mind 'er mother—Lord knows 'ow many year ago, when I was a young chap," said the elder coachman, rolling his cigar between his lips—"an' you take my word for it, if this young lady ain't the very stuck image of 'er. I've only got to shut my eyes, an' I can see the child now—just so like the mother as ever was. And both of 'em with the same names, mind you. Miss Barbara then, an' Miss Barbara now."

I listened wonderingly; I began dimly to understand. Coming a little nearer to them, I ventured to put a question, and they answered me respectfully enough.

"There is to be a wedding to-day?"

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"There is that," exclaimed the landlord heartily. "A quiet weddin', mind you—because you can't exactly 'ave much fuss an' flummery with the grass not quite grown on a grave yet, can you?"

"A grave?" I faltered.

"Ah, a grave," said the landlord, glad of a chance to talk to a stranger. "Old Mr. Savell died some three months back—father of the bride, you understand. Had a stroke early in the winter, an' never recovered."

"Never spoke, did 'e?" asked the younger coachman.

"Never a word from the moment that the Lord struck 'im down," said the landlord, with a shake of his head. "Merciful release, in a manner o' speaking; the young folks must 'ave their chance, after the old 'uns is put away. Now, boys, it's time you was goin'; I'm going to give a look in at the church myself, in time to see a bit of the bride an' the young gentleman. Why—would you believe it—in a sense 'e belongs here; used to stop in this very place when first 'e came down a-courtin' the young lady. So, you see, it's only right as the *George* should be represented, ain't it?"

I found my way out of the place, and towards the church. There was a holiday feeling in the air, and a ringing of bells; I felt that I was strangely out of place. A sudden impulse to hide myself came upon me, and I went out beyond the town, and into that green wood—beautiful now in its spring dress—that had meant so much to me so often before. And there for a long time I sat, with the peace of God stealing into my heart, listening to the ringing of the bells, and thinking gratefully that all was well—that all was better, perhaps, because I stood outside it, and could touch it no more.

Yet the bells drew me; they rang a tune in my

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ears that brought me at last to my feet, and set me upon the road to the church. There was a crowd about it now, and much jostling and laughter; I saw the round jolly face of the landlord of the *George*, and he was evidently still telling any one who would listen to him of his proprietary rights in the bridegroom. I managed to slip into the church, and found my way into a little curtained pew at the back of it, from which I could watch all that was going on, and yet remain unseen.

I had no eyes for any one but the girl; she came in on the arm of an elderly man I judged to be a family lawyer, or in some such position. She looked very beautiful as she went slowly up the old church to join her lover; I thought with a pang of how I had seen her mother—looking just like this—step over these worn stones in her bridal dress, twenty years before. I remembered, too, how I had stood there, with a bursting heart, and had seen her going out of my life. I could not bear the thought of that, even then; I knelt in my curtained pew, and hid my face in my hands, while all the rustling and whispering went on about me. Then the solemn service began, and still I knelt there, as in a dream. But I was happier then than I had ever been; for in my dream this was poor Charlie Avaline, far back in the years, wedding the woman he loved—thereafter to live happily, without any shadow on his life.

I felt that I must see her as she came out of the church; so much at least was due to me. So, with a new boldness, I stepped out of the pew, and stood there in the shadows, waiting, while she came on the arm of her young husband down the church. And the twenty odd years had taught me so much that I could stand like that, and look at it all with no feeling of envy, or bitterness for all I had suffered: only a

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great gladness that this Barbara at least was to tread a path of roses. I stood quietly there, watching her as she came down the church; if the tears were in my eyes, they were only there because I remembered poor Charlie Avaline, who had stood in the same place, and had watched that other Barbara whom he loved.

She was within a couple of yards of me when she raised her eyes, and looked straight at me. I would have drawn back, but she was too quick for me; she came forward at once, drawing Arnold Millard with her, and caught at my hand. And it seemed that I was no longer shabby and poor; all in a moment I was greater than any one there.

"It's Tinman! It's dear Tinman!" she said.

In the strangest fashion she had disengaged herself from her husband's arm, and was shaking my hands. We were saying the absurdest things to each other: I congratulating her, and wishing her well, and half laughing and half crying in my weakness and my joy; she murmuring over and over again that this was the best thing of all, to see me like this at such a time. And all about us the strange wondering faces pressing nearer.

And then before them all she raised herself on tiptoe, and kissed me on the cheek—yes, before them all! As she went out of the church, running a little eagerly for a step or two, to join her husband, who was smilingly waiting, she looked back at me, and waved her hand; and so was gone out into the sunlight, amidst a roar of cheering. I felt strangely alone; but that was, of course, inevitable. The Barbara I had loved had gone for ever out of my life; she had told me so, on that day when it had come to the parting of the ways for us. Each of us had done our part. I had been privileged to see the end that day, and now

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I must go out into the world, and live in loneliness just so many years as might be given to me. But I was no longer tired or hopeless; I had drunk deep of life, and although there were so many things I would have been glad to have had altered, there was yet so much that was better than I could have hoped. I would linger here for a little time, on this spring morning, and then would go on, to take up the quiet burden of my days.

I found my way back to the old house, and peered in at the gate. All was changed here now: the garden no longer neglected, and the house looking bright and fresh. There was no one about, and I crept in, and stood again on that terrace, looking into the room. There were bright flowers there, and the place was very different from what it had ever been before. I came away, and found my way into that wood that seemed to hold all my memories. I sat down there for the last time—reviewing, as it were, my life, and looking back to see the boy who had painted here among the trees, and had seen coming towards him, with a smile in her eyes, the Barbara of long ago.

And so it happened that I looked up presently, and saw coming through the wood the Barbara I loved: and it almost seemed, despite the passage of the years, that this was the Barbara I had always known, and who was unchanged. The heavy soiled garment of the years dropped away from me; I was again a man with hopes and longings; I suddenly realized how much this dear woman was to me, and how much we both might be, each to the other. I stood there, bareheaded in the sunlight, holding her hands, and looking into her eyes; and I was no longer old or tired; I faced life again, with the spring in my veins and in my heart.

"We are all alone, dear Tinman," she said, using

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that familiar name naturally. "I am the unknown woman, who has stood beside my husband's grave, and yet have not mourned for him; I am the woman who has stood in God's house to day, and seen my child married—just as I might have married poor Charlie Avaline, years and years ago. Such a strange life ours has been, my dear," she added softly; "it seems almost as though you and I are left alone together forgotten and unknown in the great world—with all our work done."

"But we came to the parting of the ways before, Barbara," I said; "there can be no going back now. God has been very good to me: I might never have seen you again; I might have died that shameful death twenty years ago. But I am a felon; I am branded with the brand of Cain; there is blood on my hands."

"Spilled for my sake!" she cried quickly, taking my hands, as she had done once before, and putting her lips to them. "And you lied to me, Charlie; you did not kill Olivant."

"I did not kill Olivant," I said; "but I am guilty, in that I set out to do it. Some one forestalled me: some one who has died a violent death, and paid that penalty. But that, too, was some one who loved you, in however poor a fashion. It was Jervis Fanshawe."

We talked there for a long time in the woods, and at last it seemed to me that the moment had come when I must part from her. For I would not link my life with hers; on that point I was resolute. Yet she clung to me, and told me what was in her heart.

"Years ago, Charlie, when I knew that they would not kill you, but that you must live out your life in bitter servitude for what you had done for me, I made up my mind that there was a duty before me, and that I was called to it inevitably. It seemed to me then that I must consecrate what was left of my

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life to you, and to the memory of you; your love for me had been so great a thing that in a sense I belonged to you, if only in spirit. Dear, you came back to me wonder;ully from out of your prison; you fought for me again; you were ready to lay down your life for that other Barbara, who was like the Barbara you had loved. I am lonely now—lonely and unknown; do not send me away from you!"

"I am so poor a thing for any woman to cling to," I said pitifully. "I have been down to the depths; I am a thing of poverty, and shame, and degradation."

"You are the man I love," she said, putting her arms about me. "There is a great world waiting for us—a world of sunshine, and life, and laughter; you shall learn to forget all the horror through which you have passed. Charlie, I took your name once—glad and proud to bear it; let me take it now, and keep it to the end."

* * * * *

I have set down here the record of my poor life, so far as I have lived it; yet it is as a slate, crowded with the awkward writing of a child, and much of it obliterated and rubbed out—blotted a little here and there with tears. Much, too, is being obliterated day by day of the sorrow and the misery of it; for a woman's hand steals over mine sometimes, and will not let me write of the sorrowful part that has been mine, and is mine no longer. I have been greatly blessed; I pray my God that when the time comes that He calls me to answer for my great sin, it may happen that at the last her strong warm hand holds mine, and points me to the road—that her strong brave lips whisper to me what I shall say.

THE END

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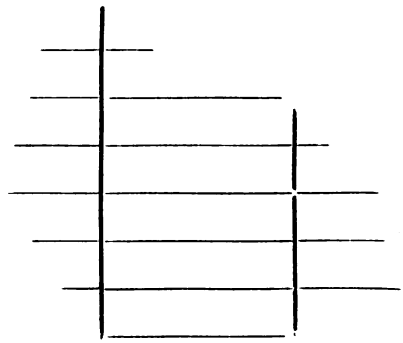

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